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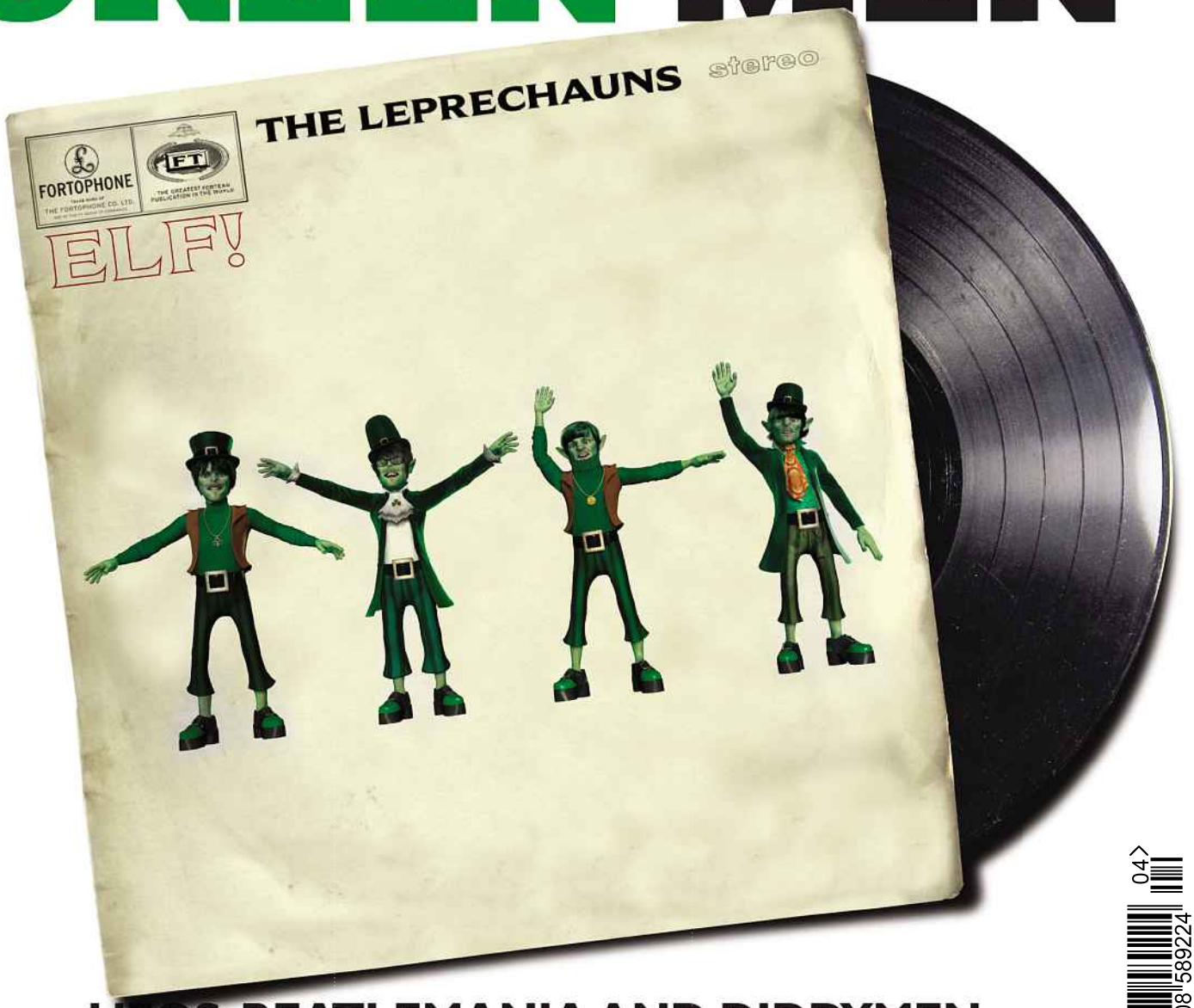

UFOS, BEATLEMANIA AND DIDDYMEN: LIVERPOOL'S LEPRECHAUN INVASION OF 1964

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FORTEAN TIMES 299 • LIVERPOOL LEPRECHAUN PANIC • ERIC J DINGWALL • VAMPIRES OF ATLANTIS • RICHARD III • COSMIC HABITUATION • ELVIS LIVES! • FEMALE ERRAND BOY • APRIL 2013

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by Shelley Bowers

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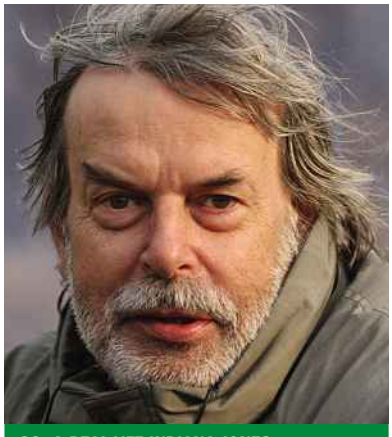

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34 ELVIS: THE COMEBACK SPECIAL
It's 36 years since his death, but the King is still seen in shopping malls and supermarkets all over the US and even popped up at President Obama's inauguration. Now, the saga has taken a new twist, with the emergence of DNA evidence and a woman claiming to be Presley's half-sister. TED HARRISON reports.

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Eric John Dingwall, author, anthropologist, librarian, psychic investigator, and, to some, the 'British Kinsey', is less well known than his erstwhile colleague and sometime adversary, Harry Price, but is a figure of equal interest, says CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE.

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FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Dennis Publishing by Wild Talents Ltd. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 0QD.

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PUBLISHED BY
DENNIS PUBLISHING,
30 Cleveland Street
London W1T 4JD, UK Tel: 020 7907 6000
GROUP PUBLISHER
PAUL RAYNER: 020 7907 6663
paul_rayner@dennis.co.uk
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PRINTED BY BENHAM GOODHEAD PRINT LTD

DISTRIBUTION
Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide
by Seymour Distribution Ltd.
2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT
Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001
Queries on overseas availability should be emailed to info@seymour.co.uk
Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 7881272

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES
12 issues: UK £39.98; EU £47.50;
REST OF THE WORLD £55; US $79.99 ($143.98 for 24 issues)

Fortean Times (USPS 023-226) is published every four weeks by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1P 4JD, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription price is $79.99.
Airfreight and mailing in the USA is by Agent named Air Business, C/O Worldnet Shipping USA Inc., 149-35 177th Street, Jamaica, New York, 11434.
Periodical postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431, USA.
US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Fortean Times, 3330 Pacific Avenue, Suite 404, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451-2983, USA.

DENNIS PUBLISHING LIMITED
GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR IAN LEGGETT
FINANCE DIRECTOR BRETT REYNOLDS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KERIN O'CONNOR
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CHAIRMAN FELIX DENNIS

ABC Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.
Circulation 17,024 (Jan-Dec 2011)

Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899
© Fortean Times: FEBRUARY 2013

editorial

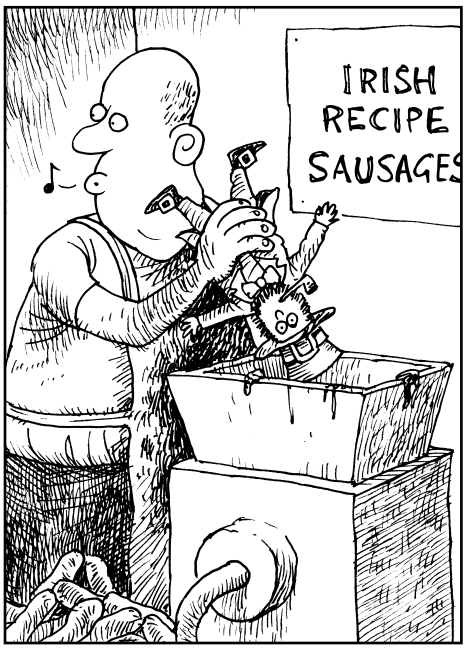
Spirited away

THE MYSTERIOUS DR DINGWALL

The world of psychical research is full of fascinating but forgotten figures, so it gives us great pleasure to present in this issue (pp44-49) the first instalment of a two-part profile of Eric John Dingwall – author, anthropologist, librarian and psychical investigator – a man of vast and varied accomplishments who has never been as widely known as his erstwhile colleague, co-investigator and sometime intellectual sparring-partner Harry Price.

Where Price was an often flamboyant character who never shied away from publicity if it could further his career, Dingwall remained – outside the world of psychical research – a shadowy and rarely-glimpsed figure, largely through his own choice. It was not out of any sense of false modesty that he avoided being photographed, for instance, but to protect his identity and allow him to attend séances and spiritualist meetings incognito and carry out his investiagtions without fear of alerting any potentially fraudulent mediums to his presence. Christopher Josiffe has enjoyed access to the Dingwall papers at Senate House Library, and shines a long overdue light onto the life and career of a man who, in his own way, was as intriguing and interesting an investigator as Harry Price himself. Even now, though, enigmas remain. Dingwall wasn't sure – and we still don't know – when he was actually born – was it 1890 or 1891? His old friend Alan Gauld recalled trying to ascertain Dingwall's date of birth, only to find that the relevent records in the Sri Lankan registry office had been eaten by termites! Rather ironic, for a man who dedicated so much of his life to preserving and cataloguing documents.

We're proud to say that Dr Dingwall even offered some encouraging words to *FT*, just a few years before his death in 1986, writing: "I know [*Fortean Times*] well and take this opportunity of congratulating you on your skilful editing and judicious selection of material." Praise indeed.



MARTIN ROSS

MISSING SPIRITUALIST MILLIONS

Eric Dingwall would doubtless be spinning in his grave had he read an article that appeared in the *Guardian* newspaper on 25 January this year (you can read the full story at http://bit.ly/W7LlRN). According to reporter David Leigh, the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain (SAGB) has divested itself of its London headquarters, a grand Georgian mansion at 33 Belgrave Square that it purchased back in 1955 for the sum of £24,500. Nothing wrong with that, you might think; no doubt the upkeep of such an impressive but ageing building was a major drain on resources for a charitable body such as the SAGB, and the thought of turning the property goldmine on which it was sitting into hard cash must have seemed like an eminently sensible idea.

The Devil was in the details of the sale, in which the SAGB flogged its Belgrave Square HQ to an anonymous offshore buyer in the British Virgin Islands, a notorious tax haven, for £6 million; this secret buyer immediately resold it for £21 million to a third party – another BVI offshore company controlled, it is reported, by the super-rich Barclay Brothers, owners of the Ritz and the *Daily Telegraph*, and no strangers to tax investigations. This outfit, claiming it had no knowledge of the seller's identity, then put the mansion back on the market for £26 million. It all sounds pretty shady and means that £15 million profit was, excuse the pun, spirited away offshore, leaving the SAGB with only a fraction of what the charity should have realised through the sale. The Charity Commission is looking into the affair, but a related matter that has exercised those interested in the Spiritualist heritage is the fate – currently unknown – of the SAGB's extensive library previously housed in Belgrave Square. Surely this would have been a case for that psychical researcher and librarian extraordinaire, Dr Eric J Dingwall?

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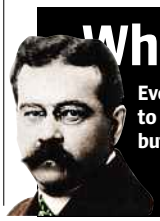
BOB RICKARD
PAUL SIEVEKING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strangedays

Looking for Richard

'R' marks the spot as the missing monarch is discovered under a car park

On 4 February we learned that the skeleton discovered under a Leicester car park last summer is that of Richard III, the last Plantagenet monarch, cut down at the Battle of Bosworth Field on 22 August 1485. Philippa Langley, an Edinburgh-based screenwriter and producer, became fascinated by Richard in 1998 and is now Secretary of the Scottish Branch of the Richard III Society. She was the originator of the 'Looking For Richard' project, which after 12 years of research and fundraising led to the Leicester excavation. "My passion for the search was based on personal intuition," she said. "The moment I walked into that car park in Leicester [in 2005] the hairs on the back of my neck stood up, and something told me this was where we must look. A year later I revisited the same place, not believing what I had first felt. And this time I saw a roughly painted letter 'R' on the ground… It was almost directly under that 'R' that King Richard was found [actually about 6ft/1.8m away]. This was the first area we excavated in fact, and it proved to be the choir of the church, the very place where we knew he was buried. And it was on the very first day [25 August 2012], the [527th] anniversary of Richard's burial, that we came across his remains."

By chance, the letter R appears in a photograph taken by the *Leicester Mercury*. Nobody seems to know why or when it was painted there. Dr Richard Buckley, co-director of the archæological team at Leicester University that excavated and studied the remains, admitted his team were sceptical when Langley kept saying that the R marked the spot where Richard was buried. Dr Buckley had used old maps and accounts from historical authors to decide where to dig the three trenches in search of Greyfriars friary.

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ABOVE: The Leicester car park, complete with letter 'R', where the long-lost king was disinterred.

"It was something of a standing joke before the dig started that R obviously marked the spot as it seemed a strange thing to spray on a car park," said Mick Bowers, principal property review officer at Leicester Council. "The best we can come up with is that maybe it signified a reserved parking spot for someone based at St Martin's. But that doesn't quite ring true, because it wasn't painted in a parking bay, it was more towards the centre of the car park."

The friary was demolished in 1538 during the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and Robert Herrick, Mayor of Leicester, built a mansion on the site, with a stone pillar in the garden marking the king's grave (seen in 1612 by Christopher Wren's father). The mansion was demolished in the 1870s and the whole site bought by Leicester City Council in 1914. Herrick's garden remained open land until the late 1930s, when parts of it were surfaced in tarmac to become two distinct car parks separated by a wall.

"Something told me this was where we must look"

The excavation bore out near-contemporary accounts that the dead king was buried in the choir of the priory church. The skeleton had 10 battle-related injuries and spinal curvature indicating severe scoliosis (spinal curvature). Crucially, a mitochondrial DNA match was found between the bones and Michael Ibsen, 55, a Canadian-born cabinetmaker living in London, who is a great (x17) grandson of Richard's older sister, Anne of York – and carbon-dating was consistent with the year 1485. The forensics showed that the king was probably killed by one or two blows to the skull, one from a sword and one from a halberd. One blow sliced off part of his skull. The only known account of his death states he was "poleaxed to the head". He was also stabbed through the buttock, probably as an act of humiliation. The way his skeleton was lying seemed to show he was naked and had his hands tied in front of him – which agreed with the account that his body was strapped naked to a horse, carried 13 miles from the battlefield to Leicester, where it was exhibited for three days before burial.

To justify his seizure of the throne, Henry Tudor had to blacken the character of the defeated king, and Richard's image became gradually more distorted. The Warwickshire chronicler John Rous was the first to describe his "unequal shoulders". The Italian Polydore Vergil, Henry VII's court historian who only came to England in 1502, said Richard was "lyttle of stature, deformyd of body, thone showlder being higher than thother", a description reiterated by Sir Thomas More. X-rays show that his portraits were painted over after his death to show one shoulder higher than the other. "Ambassadors who met Richard don't mention anything about him having a raised shoulder," said historian Alison Weir. "If there was any deformity, it is likely to have been slight." Maybe his scoliosis was hidden by clothing and only became public knowledge with the exhibition of his naked body.

The caricature of the villainous royal crookback was immortalised by Shakespeare in 1591. Drawing on work by Raphael Holinshed in

SPEAKING IN TONGUES
How George Michael woke up with a West Country accent
PAGE 8

NO SPOOKS PLEASE...
Why they don't really "do ghosts" at BBC's Radio 4
PAGE 14

DOGGED DEVOTION
The dog who mourns his mistress by going to mass
PAGE 22

the 1570s, he converted the wonky shoulder into a full hunchback, and gave him a withered arm and limp. Such deformities were seen as a punishment from God for moral wickedness. Reacting against this black propaganda since 1924, the Richard III Society (3,500 members and counting) envisaged a courageous and virtuous monarch, sound in body and mind. It's certainly true that Richard began the procedure by which those too poor to afford legal representation were able to have their grievances heard. He also introduced bail into English justice, and struck a blow for press freedom by outlawing restrictions on the printing and selling of books. However, whether he arranged the murder of his nephews will almost certainly never be known.

Dr Buckley said that they had been lucky to find the skeleton intact. "A 19th century brick outhouse came very close to destroying the grave altogether. The feet were missing, almost certainly as a result of later disturbances." Richard is to be reinterred next year in Leicester Cathedral. Some think he should be buried in York Minster – but York was the stronghold of his Lancastrian enemies, while the Yorkists' stronghold was London. Others think he should be buried in Westminster Abbey with his fellow monarchs.

DAN KITWOOD / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Philippa Langley stands besides a facial reconstruction of King Richard III.

The identification of famous bones using cutting-edge forensics has gripped the popular imagination. Roundheads ransacked Winchester Cathedral in the 1640s, and royal remains were all jumbled up; experts hope to identify the bones of Egbert, Ethelwulf, Alfred, Canute and Queen Emma, Harthacanute, and William Rufus. The Saxons' DNA can be compared with DNA from Alfred's granddaughter Eadgyth, identified in 2010 (**FT261:25**). The hunt is on for the bones of Harold II, killed in 1066, which could lie under a church in Bosham, West Sussex; but those of James II, which vanished from the chapel of the English Benedictines in Paris during the French Revolution, are probably lost for ever.

D.Telegraph, 24+25 Aug, 13 Sept 2012, 2+5+9 Feb 2013; Guardian, D.Mail, D.Express, 13 Sept; Sunday Times, 16 Sept; Mail on Sunday, 16 Dec 2012; Leicester Mercury, Guardian, 4 Feb 2013.

EXTRA! EXTRA! FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Donkey dies during memorial trip around Ireland
Irish Times, 17 Sept 2012.

Indians go to war on Tesco
D.Mail, 21 Sept 2012.

Councillors to be slashed
Daily Post, 20 Sept 2012.

ILLEGAL MONKEY LIVING ON FROSTED FLAKES BITES WOMAN
Los Angeles Times [no date]

Dwarfs emit gravitational waves
BBC News, 30 Aug 2012.

Zombies at town hall
Hull Daily Mail, 14 Sept 2012.

Heat wave grounds flying elephants
(Sonora, CA) Union Democrat, 27 July 2012.

Werewolves invade city locales
Buffalo (NY) News, 29 Sept 2012.

Dead man 'trying to turn life around'
Halifax Courier, 7 Sept 2012.

Dad phone 'ghost' hell
The People, 2 Sept 2012.

SIDELINES...

RANDY GOBLINS

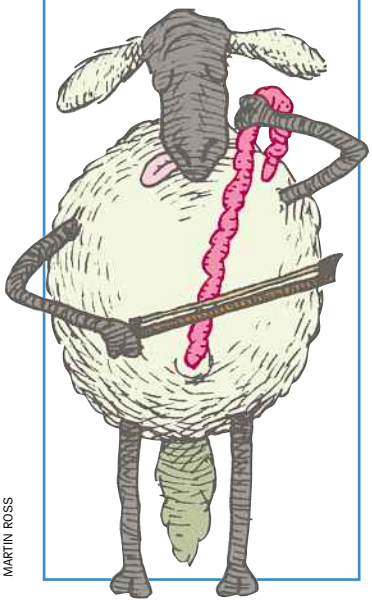
Teachers in Nembe Secondary School in Tsholotsho, Zimbabwe, are living in fear of goblins. They "caress teachers' private parts and strangle those who refuse," said one of the teachers, quoted by the *Bulawayo Chronicle*. The provincial educational director confirmed the incident and expressed concern about the increase of goblins causing problems. *Times, 24 Nov 2012*.

SPIRITED AWAY

After a boozy night out in Munich in December 2010, a man couldn't find his car and reported it as missing to police. Nearly two years later, a traffic warden discovered it by chance 4km (2.5 miles) from the spot where the now 33-year-old craftsman thought he had parked. In the boot was £32,000 worth of power tools. *[R] 12 Oct 2012*.

CATGUT MYTH

The idea that violin strings were made of catgut was invented by mediæval Italian violin-makers who had discovered that sheep intestines made good strings for their instruments. Killing a cat brought very bad luck, so they protected their invention by telling everyone their strings were made from the intestines of cats. *D.Telegraph, 15 Dec 2012.*



MARTIN ROSS

Golden finds

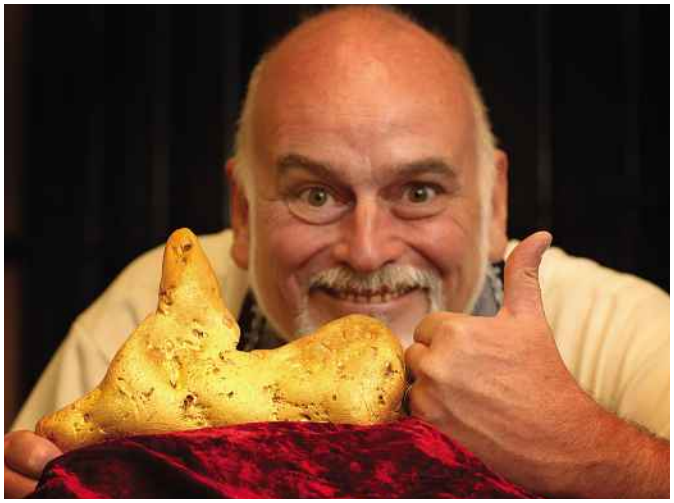
Whale vomit and a giant gold nugget

ABOVE: Ken Wilman, Madge and the 2.9kg lump of ambergris they found on the beach. **BELOW**: Cordell Kent, looking very pleased with the size of his nugget.

Ken Wilman was walking his boxer Madge on Morecambe beach in Lancashire in late January when the dog discovered a smelly yellow-grey 'stone'. Mr Wilman, 48, who is unemployed, didn't know what it was, but went home and looked it up on the Internet, where he discovered it was ambergris, a waxy, flammable substance produced in the digestive system of sperm whales and known as "floating gold". He went back to the beach and grabbed it. A French dealer has already offered him £43,000 for the 6lb 6oz (2.9kg) lump; experts say it could fetch up to £114,000, depending on its freshness. Charlie Naysmith, eight, found a piece worth £40,000 near Bournemouth last year.

The principal historical use of ambergris was as a fixative in perfumery, though it has been largely displaced by synthetics. It is usually expelled with the whale's fæces, but if the mass is too large to pass through the intestines it is thought to be expelled from the mouth, leading to its description as "whale vomit". The ancient Chinese called it "dragon's spittle fragrance". Ancient Egyptians burned it as incense, while in modern Egypt it is used for scenting cigarettes. In mediæval Europe, it was used to treat headaches, colds, and epilepsy. Some people consider it an aphrodisiac and it was once used as a food flavouring. According to Lord Macaulay, eggs and ambergris was Charles II's favourite dish. *Sun, 31 Jan; D.Telegraph, 1 Feb 2013.*

On 16 January, a man hunting for gold in Australia with a state-of-the-art metal detector unearthed a massive Y-shaped nugget over 23in (58cm) long and weighing 177oz (5kg). It was buried 2ft (61cm) down near the town of Ballarat in Victoria – and was so big that when the man first began removing the earth over it he thought it was the bonnet of a car. Local experts could not recall any nugget even approaching that size being discovered in the area before. Cordell Kent, owner of the Ballarat Mining Exchange Gold Shop, said the find was one of the most significant in his 20 years in the business. "We have 800 prospectors on our books and only a couple of those have ever found a nugget over 100 ounces," he said. "There's only been one or two big pieces and they were found a long time ago." He was seeking a buyer on behalf of the prospector, who wished to remain anonymous. "If you are silly enough to melt [the nugget] down, it would be worth just under A$300,000 [£200,000], but with this size and shape, it's worth significantly more than that." The largest gold nugget in the world, known as 'Welcome Stranger', was found at Moliagul, Victoria, in 1869. It weighed 2,520 troy oz (78kg) and returned over 2,284 troy oz (71kg) net. The runner-up was found in the Serra Pelada Mine in Brazil's Para State in 1983. It is called 'Canaã', weighs 2,145oz (60.8kg), and today is the largest nugget in existence. It was once part of a 5291.09 oz (150kg) nugget that broke during excavations. *D.Telegraph, (Sydney) D.Telegraph, Sun, 18 Jan 2013.*



DAVID CAIRD / NEWSPIX / REX FEATURES

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS SYNDICATION

New Bermuda Triangle

Another aircraft vanishes: are submarine aliens to blame?

JUAN BARRETO / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

At 11am on 4 January, a plane carrying Italian fashion mogul Vittorio Missoni and five others took off from the resort of Los Roques, a coral reef of 350 palm-fringed islands in the Caribbean, heading 87 miles (140km) south to Caracas in Venezuela. A hotel owner on the islands said he last saw the plane – a twin-engine BN-2 Islander built in 1968 – entering a bank of clouds, and Venezuela's civil aviation authority said the aircraft's last recorded position was 11 miles (18km) south of Los Roques. It seems to have disappeared over open sea. Speculation about the cause included mechanical failure and kidnapping by drug smugglers, while some blamed the 'Los Roques curse'. Since the mid-1990s, there have been at least 15 reported incidents in which small aircraft have crashed, disappeared or declared emergencies while travelling in the area. In 2008, 14 people were killed when a plane making the same journey as Missoni's crashed into the sea. No wreckage was ever found and only one body was recovered. Some have blamed pilot error or the release of methane hydrates from the sea floor. More fanciful commentators have pointed the finger at aliens living beneath the waves or souls from Atlantis.

No wreckage was found and only one body was recovered

Inevitably, comparisons were made with the 'Bermuda Triangle', a named coined in 1965 by fortean writer Vincent Gaddis to describe the area between Miami, Bermuda and Puerto Rico that has long had a reputation for unexplained disappearances of ships and planes. In fact, this area has heavy marine and aerial traffic, and, proportionally, sees no more disappearances than any other area – at least according to most experts. The region also produces unpredictable tropical storms, and the Gulf Stream here is particularly fast and turbulent. Other areas renowned for unexplained disappearances include the Formosa Triangle, the Michigan Triangle, the Sargasso Sea, and the Devil's Sea around Miyake Island, south of Tokyo. According to ancient legend, dragons lived off the coast of Japan there – hence the alternative name for the area, 'Dragon's Triangle'. Several ships have been found drifting and crewless through the calm Sargasso Sea, while legend has it that in 1840 the French merchant ship *Rosalie* was discovered with its sails set but without any crew on board.

No clue as to the fate of the plane carrying Missoni turned up until about 24 January, when a German tourist walking along the rocky north coast of the Dutch island of Curaçao – about 200 miles (320km) west of Los Roques – found a bag. It belonged to an Italian who missed the flight but whose luggage was on board the plane. Italy's air safety agency said the pilot had an expired medical fitness certificate and the company operating the aircraft was not yet authorised to fly. However, the agency said neither factor was yet being blamed for the disappearance. Seven minutes after take-off the pilot reported that he was at 5,000ft (1,524m) and 10 nautical miles from the Los Roques airport, according to the agency. The last radar readings showed the aircraft accelerating at 5,400ft (1.646m) before it quickly lost altitude and speed, veering to the right until it disappeared from the radar. *LiveScience.com, 7 Jan; Guardian, 7+29 Jan; Sun, 9 Jan 2013.*

SIDELINES...

STRANGE FLOTSAM

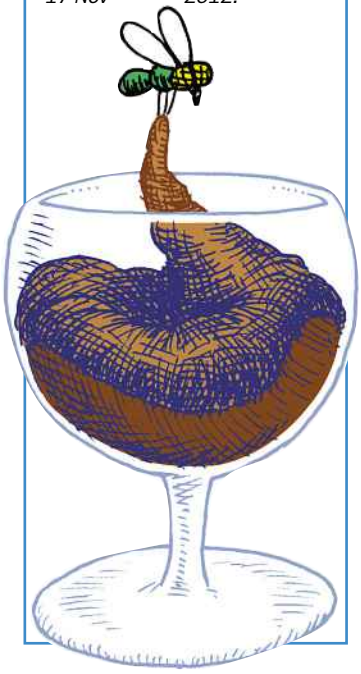
White spheres the size of golf balls were washed up on the coast around Hayling Island and Chichester in West Sussex in late November. Chichester District Council said that these were "likely to be natural emulsified oils and organic matter commonly washed up on beaches following stormy weather," but nonetheless advised people not to touch them or allow pets to eat them. *Guardian, 24 Nov; West Sussex Times, 28 Nov 2012.*

ON THE DOUBLE

During a breakfast shift at the Café Riva at Inverkip, near Greenock, Renfrewshire, part-time chef Ross Cruikshanks was amazed after cracking 19 double-yolk eggs in a row. Since then [no date given], he came across another 20, including 10 on 21 July. *D.Express, 22 July 2012.*

YOUR GOOD HEALTH!

Ttongsul or fæces wine is a traditional drink in South Korea. It is made by pouring distilled grain alcohol into a pit filled with chicken, dog or human fæces and leaving it to ferment for three months. Extra ingredients are added, including herbs, ash trees and cat bones. (We'll just stick to red, thanks). *Irish Independent, 17 Nov 2012.*



MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

WHAT THE BEEP?

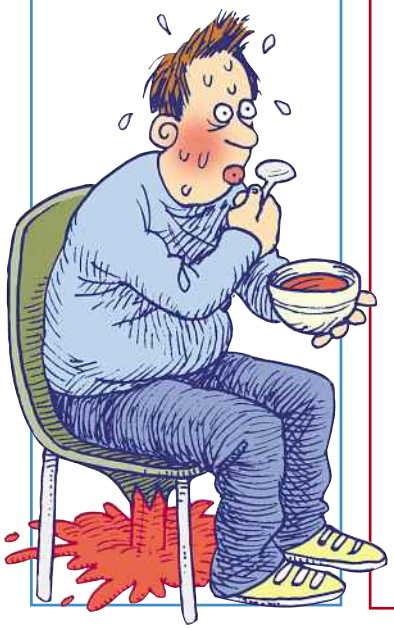
For more than a year, Paul and Janet Henry, in their 60s, were driven mad by a mystery 'beep' in their house in Frinton, Essex. It went off with increasing frequency, eventually every 30 seconds, round the clock for a fortnight, but they couldn't find the source. Cutting the power had no effect, so they paid a builder to smash holes in the plasterboard walls. Finally they found the culprit, a long forgotten smoke alarm with a failing battery, in the bottom of an old chest of drawers. *Metro, Sun, 12 Oct 2012.*

DENTAL HYGIENE

The Romans used powdered mouse brains, oyster shell ash or the ash of dogs' teeth all mixed with honey as a paste to clean their teeth. *Shropshire Star, 30 Nov 2012.*

DANGEROUS DISH

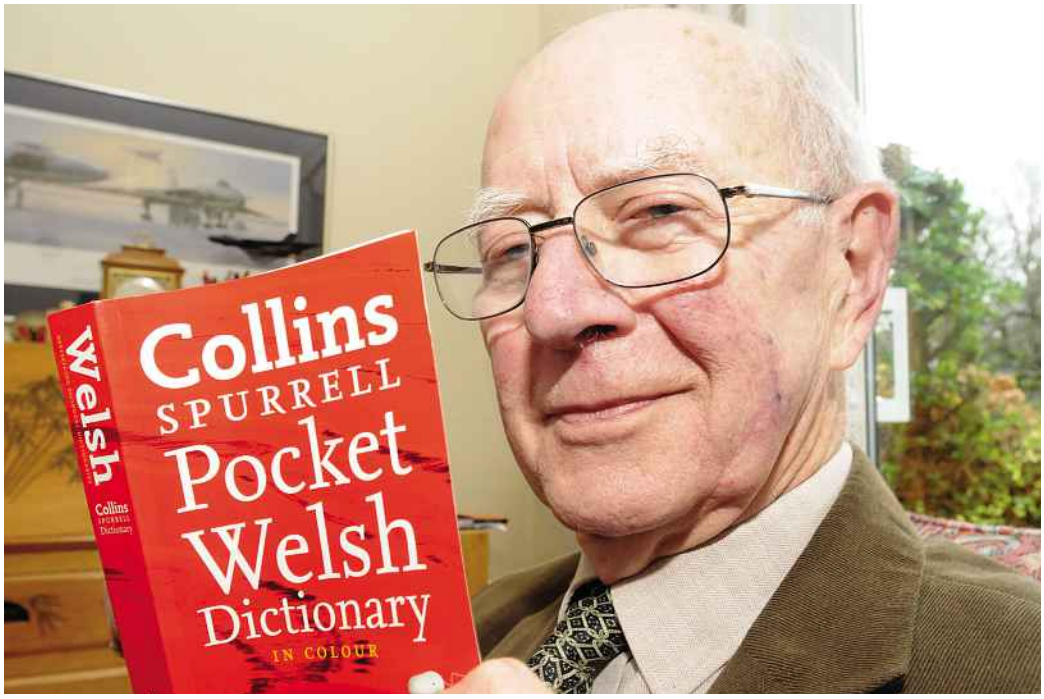
Mala soup is a traditional Chinese dish that means 'numbing hot', and usually includes Sichuan pepper, local spices and chilli pepper. It allegedly burned a hole through the stomach of a 26-year-old man who ordered the spiciest version of the dish at a restaurant in Wuhan, central China. He was taken to hospital after experiencing sharp pains and vomiting blood. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 31 Dec 2012.*



MARTIN ROSS

TWISTED TONGUES

ENGLISHMAN WAKES UP WELSH, WHILE GEORGE MICHAEL GOES WEST COUNTRY



KEVIN BATES / SWNS.COM

ABOVE: Alun Morgan, the Englishman who suffered a stroke and woke up speaking fluent Welsh. He was diagnosed with aphasia.

SURPRISED BY WELSH

An Englishman who suffered a stroke woke up speaking fluent Welsh. Alun Morgan, 81, was evacuated to his grandmother's house in Mid-Wales in 1944 when he was 12. During his time there, he was surrounded by Welsh speakers but never spoke the language himself. He returned to London at the end of the war in 1945. The severe stroke in 2010 put him in a coma; when he regained consciousness three weeks later, he was speaking Welsh and couldn't remember any English. Mr Morgan, a retired Royal Naval Air Commodore, lives in Bathwick, Somerset, with his wife Yvonne. He said: "I must have picked up the Welsh because my nan, whom I went to live with during the war, spoke terrible English. It gave my wife the shock of her life when I started speaking Welsh. After the stroke it was hard-going. I've managed to remember English, but I've forgotten Welsh again." Doctors diagnosed him with aphasia, a form of brain damage that causes a shift in the brain's language centre – but this doesn't begin to explain why he started speaking Welsh. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 28 Dec 2012.*

Sandra awoke from a coma able to speak perfect German

• Willard Edwards moved his family from Alabama to the Soviet Union in 1934, believing the future lay with communism. Changing his mind, he returned to the US with his wife and children – apart from his eldest son, Edward, who was stuck behind as his father had insisted he give up his American citizenship. Edward married a Russian, and for the next 60 years worked in a watch-making factory in Zlatoust, an industrial outpost in the Urals. In 1992, when he had a reunion with his sister in Moscow, he had trouble speaking to her because he had forgotten much of his English. Then in 2011, aged 95, he suffered a stroke and reverted to English. "I say something in Russian to him, and he replies only in English," said his wife Zoya, 79. He told a journalist in a halting American accent: "I am having to learn Russian all over again." *MX News (Sydney), 14 June 2011.*

• *FT* has noted earlier cases of what we might call 'foreign language syndrome'. In 1996, Anglophone Anne Bristow-Kitney woke up speaking perfectly accented French after a cerebral hæmorrhage [**FT102:15**]. In 2004, English holiday rep Tricia Whitehead awoke from a coma after her car plunged over a cliff in the Canary Islands and began speaking Spanish [**FT230:14**]. In 2010 Sandra Ralic from Croatia was admitted to hospital with blood poisoning. A month later she fell into a coma and woke up speaking perfect German and unable to speak her native Croatian. According to psychiatric expert Dr Mijo Milas, "There are

references to cases where people have awoken from a coma being able to speak other languages – sometimes even the biblical languages such as that spoken in old Babylon or Egypt" [**FT264:18**]. Believers in reincarnation take note.

NEW VOICES

Foreign *accent* syndrome (FAS) is more familiar than foreign language syndrome. It was first recorded in 1907 if not earlier, and we have noted many cases in these pages. The condition can disappear after a few months or years, but some people never lose their new accents.

- Karen Butler, 56, a tax consultant from Toledo, Oregon, had never travelled further than Mexico. In November 2009 she had all her top teeth and front bottom teeth removed because of gingivitis. When she awoke from the anæsthetic, her mouth was sore and swollen and she "talked funny". A week later the swelling had gone but she still sounded strange. NBC's "Today" programme described her accent as "an odd mixture or Irish, Scottish, and northern British, with perhaps a dash of Australian and South African for good measure." Others heard an eastern European or Swedish accent. It was suggested she might have suffered a small stroke. She couldn't hear her own accent, but could feel herself forming words differently. Eighteen months later, her accent had softened and she sounded less "Transylvanian". *latimes.com, 5 May; D.Mail, 2 June; [AP] telegraph.co.uk, 6 June 2011.*

- Rebecca Collins, 39, from Fleet in Hampshire, awoke in hospital to find she had a Polish accent. She was under observation following an ear infection. "Even my mum didn't recognise my voice," she said. "The only benefit is that men say they find my accent sexy." *Sun, D.Star, 7 Oct 2011.*

- Debbie McCann, 48, suffered a suspected minor stroke in November 2010 that changed her voice. "I've lived in Glasgow all my life and had a strong Glaswegian accent before the stroke," she said. "For the first two weeks I couldn't speak at all. When my voice came back, I sounded Chinese. Now, people say I sound more like I'm from Italy, yet I've never been to either of those countries." The condition also affected her gestures and she even began writing with a "foreign accent" – omitting words like 'to' and 'a'. *D.Express, D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, 30 Sept 2011.*

- Debie Royston, 40, has lived in Gillingham, Kent, for 17 years, but was born in Birmingham and had a strong Brummie accent. Then she developed flu-like symptoms and had up to 10 seizures a day. While waiting to see a neurologist, she suffered another seizure that left her unable to speak for a month. With intensive therapy her voice returned – with a French accent, although she had never been to France. At first she felt she had lost her identity, but after a year she was beginning to get used to it. "Sometimes I think it would be easier just to say I am from France," she said, "but then people might start talking French to me." *telegraph.co.uk, 9 Feb; D.Express, D.Mirror, 10 Feb 2012.*

- Georgios Panayiotou, 49, the singer-songwriter known as George Michael, was struck down by pneumonia in November 2011, and was hospitalised in Vienna. Emerging from a three-week coma, he sounded as if he were from Bristol. "There's nothing wrong with a West Country accent," he said, "but it's a bit weird when you're from north London." The accent faded after a couple of days. He attributed it to his obsession, shortly before his illness, with the BBC sitcom *Nighty Night*, starring Somerset-born Julia Davis. *telegraph.co.uk, 18 July 2012. For the latest round-ups of FAS, see* **FT264:18-19, 268:22, 269:25.**

ABOVE: Singer George Michael emerged from a coma with a West Country accent.

JEFF J MITCHELL / GETTY IMAGES

SIDELINES...

CLEVER CLUCKER

Over six weeks, Helen Jones of Felmingham in Norfolk taught JJ, a rescued battery chicken, to count up to seven – rewarding correct answers with sunflower seeds. When she shows the bird a numbered playing card, it pecks the correct number of times. JJ is now learning to play noughts and crosses. *D.Mail, Sun, 15 Nov 2012.*

GOBSTOPP-AH

A road crash may have saved the life of a 50-year-old taxi driver in Wuppertal, Germany, on 28 October. He choked on a sweet, lost control of his cab during a coughing fit, and hit a parked truck – before passing out and hitting a parked car. The impact presumably dislodged the sweet from his throat and he regained consciousness. The driver and his passenger, 87, were unscathed. *MX News (Sydney), 30 Oct 2012.*

FAMILY COMMITMENTS

Three senior judges at South Africa's Labour Appeals Court have accepted a witchdoctor's sick note as a legitimate reason for a woman to miss work – enabling her to resume her job as a chef near Durban. The note claimed that Johanna Mmelodi was "seeing visions of her dead ancestors" and should be permitted a month off work so as not to "offend" her ancestors by "ignoring" them. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 29 Oct 2012.*

PISCINE ENTERPRISE

European catfish residing in the River Tarn in southwestern France have been videoed lunging out of the water, grabbing pigeons and wriggling back into the water to swallow their prey. The fish range in length from 3ft to nearly 5ft (90cm-150cm). The study results were published in the scientific journal *PLoS ONE*. Some dolphins and killer whales have exhibited similar behaviour, though both are mammals and better equipped to survive on land for brief periods of time. *The Sideshow, 8 Dec 2012.*

SIDELINES...

BEASTLY OFFENCE

A drunken student was caught by police in Russe, Bulgaria, with his pants around his ankles, trying to have sex with a bronze statue of a lion. Matthias Maier, 24, was charged with obscenity. *Sun, 10 Nov 2012*.

SKUNK SABOTAGE

A television station in Colorado Springs was knocked off air when a skunk peed on the transmitter. The animal got into the transmitter room on Cheyenne Mountain and burned itself while touching equipment. It responded by spraying the wires, which caused a power cut. *Irish Independent, 17 Nov 2012*.

BLAZING IN-FUR-NO

A blaze that gutted eight apartments in Holland Township, Michigan, was caused by an unnamed resident trying to cook a squirrel with a propane torch. He was preparing to eat the animal and was burning off its fur on a third-floor wooden balcony. His 32 neighbours were left homeless, but the only injury was a fireman's broken toe. *[AP] 12 Oct 2012*.

SOCK BANDIT

In mid-December, a 16-year-old Japanese schoolgirl was wrestled to the ground by a man in his 30s or 40s, who ripped a sock off her left foot. At least four other girls had been victims of similar attacks in the same suburb of Tokyo since September. "In the third case, a man took the girl's leggings off," said a policeman. "In all the other cases, victims lost one of their socks." *D.Telegraph, 15 Dec 2012*.

BAD KARMA SNAKES

A village in China's Heibei province was overrun by snakes after a Buddhist group released thousands of serpents as part of a ritual. The Let Blessings and Wisdom Grow group had hoped that the act of fang sheng or compassionate release would bring good karma. Instead, it brought a fine of 40,000 yuan (£4,000). *D.Telegraph, 6 June 2012.*

SCREAMING SQUIRREL

A squirrel presents a macabre sight with this mask, which was put up as a Hallowe'en decoration in a garden in Fareham, Hampshire. *D.Telegraph, 25 Oct 2012.*

MIKE WALKER / REX FEATURES

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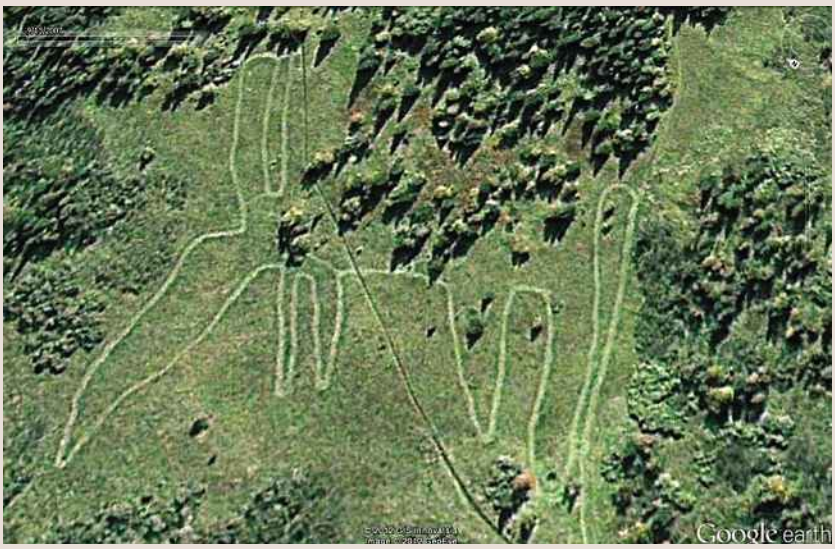
MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING on the recent discovery of a giant Russian geoglyph older than the Nazca Lines – and the curious, curse-ridden history of a winged seahorse brooch looted from the tomb of a Lydian princess



RUSSIAN GEOGLYPH

Examining a Google Earth satellite image (above) in 2007, Alexander Shestakov noticed a huge stone structure in the shape of an elk or deer near Lake Zjuratkul in the Urals north of Kazakhstan. It had an elongated muzzle, four legs, two antlers, and what looked like a tail – although the latter is less clear today. Excluding the tail, the animal is about 900ft (275m) long. It faces north and is visible from a nearby ridge.

"The figure would initially have looked white and slightly shiny against the green grass background," according to archæologist Stanislav Grigoriev and monument conservationist Nikolai Menshenin, in their report, published in *Antiquity* last spring. It is now covered by a layer of soil. Fieldwork carried out last summer suggests the glyph may be the product of a megalithic culture. Grigoriev and his team found the remains of passageways and what appear to be small walls on the hoof and muzzle of the animal. "The hoof is made of small crushed stones and clay," he said. "It seems to me there were very low walls and narrow passages among them. Also in the area of a muzzle: crushed stones and clay, four small broad walls and three passages."

Finds include about 40 quartzite tools found on the structure's surface, most of them mattocks, useful for digging and chopping. The style of stone-working suggests these are Eneolithic (between the Neolithic and the Bronze Age – fourth to third millennium BC). This would make the geoglyph far older than Peru's Nazca lines, the very earliest of which, we are told, were created around 500 BC. Current studies of ancient pollen at the Russian site should provide a more precise date.

Some 300 megalithic sites have been discovered in the Urals, including numerous menhirs, but few have been studied in detail. The most elaborate structures are on the relatively small Vera Island, located on Turgoyak Lake, about 35 miles (60km) northeast of the elk geoglyph. Grigoriev described these megaliths in a 2010 article, noting the surviving portion of one monument, megalith two, as being covered by a mound and supporting a gallery and square chamber. Another monument, megalith one, is cut into the bedrock and covered by a mound. More than 60ft (18m) long and 20ft (6m) wide, it contains three chambers one of which has bas-relief sculptures of animals, probably a bull and wolf. Stone tools and ceramics date these sites date to between the Eneolithic and the early Iron Age. *LiveScience, 12 Oct 2012.*

ABOVE: Excavations at the site, revealing clay and stone structures and shapes made up of smaller, crushed stones. Views of the geoglyph's location from below and atop the Zjuratkul ridge.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STANISLAV GRIGORIEV

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

161: FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

"A code of symbols that print in rock, like symbols of telephotographers in selenium" – Fort, *Books*, p260.

The word 'steganography', from Greek roots meaning 'closely-hidden writing' entered English via the Latin-titled treatise *De Stenographia* composed by Johannes Tirthemius in 1499 but not published until 1606 in Frankfurt – text available online. An appropriate classical pedigree, Greeks and Romans being diversely adept at sending secret messages.

A prime source of information is a treatise by the fourth-century BC Greek soldier Aeneas the Tactician – text and translation in the Loeb Classical Library series. He details 18 different methods of sending secret messages – some ciphers, others ingenious ways of concealing straightforward information.

"For especially secret messages (Aeneas recommends), insert into your luggage a book coded by marking certain letters with dots at long intervals or unusually long strokes." Replacing vowels by a dots system was a related device. David Kahn analyses sundry Aenean examples in his *The Codebreakers* (MacMillan, 1967; rev. ed., Scribner, 1996) The *Washington Post* (24 April 1918) reported Indian revolutionaries using marked copies of the Koran, a text exempt from local censorship.

Julius Cæsar (Suetonius, *Life*, ch56 para6) used a simple transposition code (D = A, etc) in his confidential letters. The grammarian Probus published a decipherment key: Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, bk17 ch9 para5. Melchias Uken (*Steganometrographia*, 1751, on-line) devised a way of encoding messages within Latin elegiac verses (see Laura Gibbs in online magazine 'VATES' 3, 2011). Might be worth looking at some classical texts in this light.

Message boards were a popular trick, the secret communication written on wood covered with wax in which a fake one was traced. Herodotus (*Histories*, bk 7 ch238) describes how exiled king Demaratus sent such a one to Sparta with information on Xerxes's invasion plans, deciphered after much male head-scratching by queen Gorgo. Alternatively, the secret message would be written on a boxwood tablet in black ink, dried, and covered by whitening; the recipient would wash this cover away, disclosing the text.

More ingeniously, words were written on the outside of an inflated, knotted animal bladder, then deflated, stuffed into a flask of oil, the addressee simply emptying the flask and extracting the bladder, which was then recycled by sponging it off and sending an answer the same way – gives a whole new meaning to 'getting bladdered'.

Diverse means of carrying secret messages included soldiers' wound bandages, armour, and sandals; between an individual's fingers (not unknown in modern exam rooms); dog collars; carrier pigeons; and animals' tails. Dio Cassius (*Roman History*, bk68 ch8 para1) describes the sending of a message to emperor Trajan on campaign written in Latin on a giant mushroom.

Herodotus (bk5 chs34-6) describes how tyrant Histiæus shaved a slave's head, tattooed his message on the scalp, waited for hair regrowth, then sent slave to ally who reshaved head and read it – first recorded use of hair-mail.

Invisible ink sounds straight out of Sexton Blake, but Pliny (*Natural History*, bk26 ch339 para62) says if you trace letters with the juice of the Tithymallus ('milky plant') on the body, let them dry, and sprinkle with ash, they become visible. He adds this was a regular way for lovers to write to unfaithful wives, a trick confirmed by Ovid (*Art of Love*, bk 3 vv627-30) who (*ibid.* bk1 vv457-8) also mentions *billets doux* inscribed on apples – hence (?) our expression 'apple of one's eye'.

Last, emphatically not least, the much-disputed Spartan 'message-stick' ('skytale'). Some deny it was Spartan or even Greek, but a Roman device – however, Classical Greek sources attest both stick and Spartan usage. It was well-enough known for Aristophanes (*Lysistrata*, v.993) to apply the word jokingly to an erect cock.

Basically, the skytale was a secret message communicator between top Spartan officials in war. Both users had a stick of equal size. A message written on a leather strip wound round the sender's, and then detached, became unintelligible until rewound on the recipient's. It remains unclear if these messages were in code or not, also Aeneas's failure to mention it is odd. But I see no reason to doubt the skytale's existence and Spartan pedigree.

Don't bother looking for any secret messages here – would I keep anything from *FT* readers?

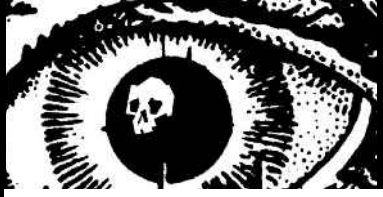
WINGED SEAHORSE RETURNS

A gold brooch in the form of a hippocampus (winged seahorse), from a 7th century BC hoard known as the Karun Treasure, is to be returned to Turkey after a chequered history. The brooch was part of a collection of 363 Lydian artefacts from Usak Province in western Anatolia looted from burial mounds in 1966-67. It came from the tomb chamber of a Lydian princess, the roof of which had been dynamited for access. The artefacts were sold on, and were eventually exhibited in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art in the 1980s. After a six-year legal battle that reportedly cost Turkey £25 million, the brooch was repatriated in 1993 and went on display in the Usak Museum of Archæology; but in 2006, after a tip-off, it was discovered to have been switched with a fake, probably between March and August 2005.

After an investigation, museum director Kazim Akbiyikoglu and 10 others were arrested. Akbiyikoglu admitted selling museum treasures to pay off gambling debts and was jailed for 13 years. He blamed his misfortune on an ancient curse said to afflict those who handle the treasure. Rumour has it that all seven men involved in the illegal excavation of the burial mounds died violent deaths or suffered great misfortune – but details are unclear, as are the specifics of the brooch's latest recovery, allegedly from Germany. *Hurriyet Daily News (Turkey), 24 Nov; Guardian, 26 Nov 2012.*

BELOW: The real hippocampus brooch is seen at top on a blue background, with the fake pictured below it.

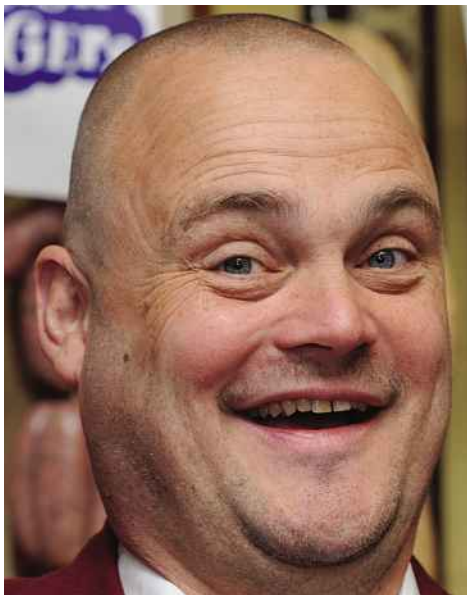
AFP / GETTY IMAGES



MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE finds that the BBC's Today Programme "doesn't do ghost stories"



STUART WILSON / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Do the posters of 1970s pop stars famously adorning the bedroom walls in this photo suggest that the Enfield Poltergeist was the product of 'social stresses' or teenagers' worries about the economy? **ABOVE RIGHT**: Or should that be that the Ealing Poltergeist? Pub Landlord Al Murray isn't quite sure...

NO GHOSTS AT THE BBC

The topics of ghosts and the Enfield poltergeist in particular became national news on New Year's Day 2013 when they featured on *Today*, BBC Radio 4's prestigious current affairs programme. The feature drew upon help given via *Fortean Times*, but the broadcast turned out very differently from what was originally expected. Certainly, it casts a revealing light on how topics of fortean interest get treated by the current controllers of BBC Radio 4 news.

For regular listeners of the *Today* programme, a discussion of poltergeists may have come as a something of a surprise at the start of the year. Between 6am and 9am every morning, *Today* covers politics, business, sport and culture, international affairs, trailers for other Radio 4 programmes, and the occasional scientific discovery. Normally, the programme doesn't depart from this format by troubling its listeners with six impossible things before breakfast. Having been a listener to the programme since my early teens, I can recall ghosts being mentioned on only three occasions. The first was in 1976 when a story about a headless dog haunting the gates of the home of Princess Anne and her then husband, Captain Mark Philips, was mentioned (the origin of this was a James Wentworth Day story in *Weekend Magazine*). The second was in December 1997, when a ghost was seen by Dr Andrew Murison, bursar of Peterhouse College, Cambridge. The most recent was in January 2009 with a story about a ghost appearing outside a pub in Northern Ireland (**FT247:10**) – but none since, although there may well have been more which I missed or have forgotten. (I would be delighted to be corrected on this).

I ENDED UP BEING RECORDED ON AN ENFIELD STREET SHORTLY BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Thus, whilst daily highlighting turmoil across the globe, *Today* succeeds in presents a remarkably orderly Universe for listeners in its 'Thought for the Day' slot, falling somewhere between Richard Dawkins's atheism and a liberal Church of England version of Christianity. The daily view of our Universe as presented by *Today* is one which business chiefs, greens, gays, feminists, multiculturalists, former Marxists, members of UKIP and a continual procession of Government Ministers and Members of Parliament can all comfortably cope with.

In short, I suspect there is an unwritten rule that *Today* "doesn't do ghost stories", part of a wider policy since the 1980s of jettisoning quirky stories which former *Today* presenter John Timpson, an indefatigable collector of British historical curiosities, once complained about. However, rules get relaxed over Christmas and New Year when Today invites "guest editors" to take over editing an edition, allowing the presentation of some different material at a time when the ordinary run of "news" is quiet.

This year taking over as guest editor for New Year's Day was stand-up comedian Al Murray ("the Pub Landlord"). Oblivious to *Today's* rule against ghost stories, he wanted to do something on a story he heard as about as a child concerning something called "the Ealing Poltergeist". Somewhat at a loss to fulfil this perplexing request, the programme's producers and editors, having no instant expert on poltergeists available or listed on their blackberries, contacted *Fortean Times*. After swiftly establishing that what Al Murray probably meant was the Enfield poltergeist, the ever-helpful David Sutton referred the matter to me. I then contacted Guy Lyon Playfair, author of *This House Is Haunted* (1980/2009), the classic book on the case, and several other specialists.

Together with two other researchers, one with a physics background and another a hypnotherapist, I ended up being recorded in an Enfield street, shortly before Christmas. Why we had to go to Enfield I don't know, as I repeatedly pointed out that nothing had happened there for over 30 years and that the original family about whom manifestations revolved were long gone. However, it all turned out to be part of a skilful exercise in re-writing the whole feature at the behest of the producers and for transmission on 1 January 2013.

For those of you who missed the show, don't worry: I am afraid it was not a landmark of broadcasting. A few remarks exchanged on air between Al Murray and the presenters confirmed that it was only Murray's visiting editorship that placed ghosts on the schedule at all. Indeed, what proved far more interesting was how the producers worked to give the subject an acceptable spin for *Today's* audience (such as it was on New Year's Day morning just past 7.30am).

Over 95 per cent of what we had said at Enfield was edited out, including every word from my two colleagues (this was despite

the BBC having taken them there and back by taxis at a cost of hundreds of pounds). My own contribution was also severely edited down to sound bites and used out of context. Similarly, extracts from the BBC's own archive recordings from *The World This Weekend* from September 1977 were shrunk down into snippets and given some backing music by Black Sabbath. Instead of actually discussing the Enfield case, the producer wanted to promote the view that during the 1970s ghosts supposedly moved out of historic spooky locations and into suburbia, in reaction to challenging economic circumstances. This is a mutilated version of the psychosocial theory of the supernatural, which originally grew up around UFO sightings.

Now, there may or may not be something in this idea – it is one which can be debated endlessly. I see it as an unscientific hypothesis since it is not falsifiable – it is hard to see how you could ever disprove it. Basically, it presumes that in some unknown fashion social stresses and strains result in people seeing or imagining they see things that are spiritual, mystical or supernatural. The UFO magazine called *Magonia* promoted this idea for many years, suggesting that sightings of flying saucers reflected (for example) fears about East-West conflict and the threat of the Cold War turning hot. Proponents could point to waves of UFO sightings that occurred in 1973 when an Arab-Israeli conflict broke out and in 1979 when the Russians invaded Afghanistan. Yet the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 when the world came closest to nuclear war sparked no such wave of sightings, and Israel – which is on a constant state of alert – produces virtually no such sightings. Similarly, historian Hugh Trevor-Roper raised the possibility of "psychopaths" co-ordinating their delusions under the effects of social strain and the threat of torture in his *The European Witch Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1967), but didn't explain the psychiatric mechanism involved.

Neither does the theory of social strain make sense when applied to the Enfield poltergeist. There were economic problems and industrial unrest in 1973-74 and in the winter of 1978-1979, but 1977 was the year of the Queen's Silver Jubilee and the general mood was upbeat (events at Enfield began at the end of August, a bank holiday period). Furthermore, how exactly does social strain transform into poltergeist activity and physical phenomena? Were the teenage girls at Enfield really worried about the economic problems of the 1970s (having pictures of pop-stars, not trade union leaders and economists, pinned up on their bedroom wall)? So far as 1970s politics and economics intrudes, from Guy Playfair's book it appears that their mother Peggy was thinking of voting for the Liberal Party (as our Liberal Democrats were then known).

In my own view, whilst a few ghosts are said to appear at times of national crisis, at our current level of understanding, the social-strain theory of fortean phenomena may be classed as just a materialistic version of Shakespeare's doctrine of Nature, which held that turmoil in earthly kingdoms was reflected by strange visions and comets in the sky, or perhaps a non-mystical version of Carl Jung's signs from the collective unconscious (such as his warning in 1918 that the "blonde beast" archetype was stirring in the collective psyche of Germany, a harbinger of the Nazi movement).

The idea that ghosts are to be found in suburbia is not new. In fact, it was reported on the BBC by psychical researchers as long ago as 1934 when Sir Ernest Bennett appealed on the wireless (as it was then known) for ghost stories. Harry Price broadcast throughout the 1930s and 1940s and extraordinary phantoms were considered in intellectual discussion programmes such as *The Brain's Trust* (see a 'Christmas Ghost Story – The Monk Had Ears of a Dog' a Brain's Trust session reported in the *Daily Express* of 23 Dec 1943). The same idea was recognised by Dennis Bardens, founder of *Panorama* (obit **FT201:26**), when he broadcast on the topic of ghosts in 1946, by the late Philip Paul on a Hallowe'en broadcast for *Panorama* in 1955, and on many other occasions.

Finally on the *Today* programme was Roger Clarke – whom I had suggested to the programme on account of his excellent recent book *The Natural History of Ghosts* (2012) – quoted as saying that ghost stories become more common at certain times, perhaps in economic downturns. However, it seems entirely possible that Roger said a lot more. In fact there has never been a period when ghost stories have not been current, as his own excellent history of the subject (to be reviewed in due course) clearly attests.

Having ventilated my views on Enfield before, I am none too worried about the BBC's treatment of what was only ever likely to be at best a seasonal piece on ghosts. Notably, Guy Playfair avoided involvement in the programme altogether, having obtained an out-of-court settlement against the BBC for copyright infringement of his book on Enfield in 1992. However, I remain very glad that I avoided mentioning theories that link poltergeist activity with adolescent sexuality. Whilst the BBC had been prepared to air this notion when reporting in 1977, following the Jimmy Savile scandal I don't think even Al Murray would have managed to get that theory past the current controllers of the *Today* programme….

THE WERE-SHEEP OF CUMBRIA

Certainly, apparitions of monks with the ears of a dog are precisely the type of story avoided today on a serious BBC contemporary affairs programme. Another story that would be a challenge is the Hexham Heads, recently featured in these pages (**FT294:42-47**, **295:44-51**). The strange experience of Celtic scholar Anne Ross and her sighting of a half-human/half-animal form associated with the heads did once feature on an edition on the 1970s nightly news show *Nationwide*, which went out at tea-time on BBC 1 until 1983 (an encounter with Margaret Thatcher might have helped kill it off), but never since.

Another story originally collected for radio but which is unlikely ever to be broadcast today is an odd tale recounted in Terence Whittaker's book *England's Ghostly Heritage* (1989) – possibly the only case of what may be called a "were-sheep". Reading the Hexham Head articles with the suggestion the phantom might be linked with the slaughter of sheep at a local abattoir, and subsequent features on mystery sheep-killing beasts and phantom hitch-hikers in *FT298*, I was reminded of Whittaker's story, appearing as it does in a chapter entitled "Phantom Hitch-hikers and Other Nasties". Whittaker states that the story "cropped up regularly in conversation when I was researching a radio series in Cumbria" featuring an entity called 'Bele Sheephead' who supposedly haunts Broughton Moor road near Flimby, about halfway between Workington and Maryport in Cumbria.

To cut a risible story short, Bele Sheephead was reputedly a young girl who discovered her pet lamb killed by a fox. Despite her love for the animal, upon finding its body she felt an irresistible urge to drink its blood. She thereafter acquired an insatiable thirst for fresh sheep's blood, eventually becoming half-sheep and returning in spectral form to terrify motorists in the area. Whittaker states: "There are many well-authenticated accounts of motorists coming to grief in the area after encountering something resembling the legendary Bele," with "the most consistent" telling of how a married couple driving from Flimby becoming stranded when their car ran out of petrol. The man went off to get help and the wife dozed off in the car. Sometime later, she was awoken by the arrival of the police and an ambulance. A policeman told her to get out of the vehicle and not look back. However, being of a curious disposition she did and saw the decapitated body of her husband in the road, and his severed head on a nearby fence. According to Whittaker, "The case has never been solved. The unfortunate man was later buried in Flimby churchyard, where his grave can be found today. A victim, the locals believe of Bele Sheephead."

For those with a taste for modern folklore, this tale will be instantly recognisable as a British variant of a well-known American urban legend known as "the hook", worthy of a place in Jan Harold Brunvand's classic book *The Phantom Hitch-hiker: Urban Legends and Their Meanings* (1981). According to Whittaker, Bele Sheephead was last encountered in 1972, thus making her a close contemporary with the entity in the Hexham Heads case….

LOOK OUT BELOW!

Rains of chicken and worms; a shower of shit and a plummeting puppy; ice from the sky, and a leopard shark on the 12th tee...

CHUCKING DOWN CHICKEN

A teenager's riding lesson in Assawoman [sic], Virginia, ended abruptly after a foot-long (30cm) hunk of raw chicken fell out of a cloudless sky and hit her on the head. Fortunately, what landed on Cassie Bernard in early October 2012 was the smallest of three or more poultry parts that rained down as owner Jennifer Cording was giving a lesson to a group of advanced students while several parents looked on. Luckily, Bernard was wearing a riding helmet and was not injured.
A nearby Tyson Foods Inc. processing plant denied that the flying chicken parts originated there.

An official from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality said the plummeting poultry could have come from improperly composted dead chickens being spread on a nearby farm, although such an occurrence had never been noted before. Bryan D Watts, director of the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary, blamed gulls. "I doubt it would be vultures because they don't typically carry things and they don't regurgitate in the air," he said. "It's more likely gulls, which we know carry chicken parts."

Scientists from the centre monitoring gull colonies in seaside marshes on the eastern shore of Virginia had encountered "a lot of chicken bones" coming from the area, he said. Cording's farm is located between those marshes and a poultry-processing facility in Temperanceville, Virginia, about three miles (4.8km) to the west as the crow (or gull) flies. *The Oshkosh Northwestern, 10 Oct 2012.*

SHARK INTERRUPTS GOLF

On 22 October, a leopard shark, bleeding but alive, fell out of the sky on to the 12th tee at San Juan Golf Course in California. Staff put it into fresh water with added sea salt from the clubhouse kitchen. The 2lb (900g) fish had puncture marks where it appeared a bird had plucked it from the Pacific, about five miles (8km) away. It was returned to the ocean, where it was still for a few seconds before speeding off. *D.Telegraph, Aberdeen Press & Journal, 27 Oct 2012.*

TERRY COLON

A leopard shark fell out of the sky on to the 12th tee at San Juan Golf Course

WRONG KIND OF SNOW

Cocaine rained down on the town of Sapezal, in Brazil's southern state of Mato Grosso, with £20,000 blocks of wacky dust falling from the sky into gardens, woods and fields. Police, who found 60kg (132lb) of the drug, believe it was dropped from a plane from nearby Bolivia, and was meant to be picked up by accomplices in a van. Guns and ammo were also found. *D.Mirror, 24 Mar 2012.*

SHIT SHOWER

Artie Hughes and his wife were enjoying an unseasonably warm evening on their patio in Malverne, New York, in February 2012 when they, their garden table and their barbeque were pelted by a black oily liquid. Mr Hughes, who lives near John F Kennedy Airport, said: "A plane was coming over. Next thing you know my wife says, 'Oh my God it's raining'. I said, 'No it's not'." Police later surmised it was sludge that had leaked from an aircraft lavatory. *D.Mail, MX News (Brisbane), 29 Feb 2012.*

PRAYER INTERRUPTED

Father James MacKay was leading the Eucharistic prayer at Brentwood Cathedral in Essex on 1 July 2012 when there was what sounded like a massive explosion. The congregation looked on as a shower of roof slate and ice fell outside the building. The cathedral's roof and beams had been damaged by falling ice. It was unclear from the reports if this was blue ice from an aircraft lavatory, white ice from an aircraft wing, or of meteorological origin. A spokesman for the CAA said such blocks could be formed on aircraft if the washer which connected a hose to a water tank supplying the galley failed at altitude. Then, he explained, water could leak out and freeze, before melting and falling to earth as the plane descended into warmer air. "Ice falling from the sky is a natural phenomenon which accounts for quite a lot of the reports of ice blocks from aircraft," he said. "We receive about 30 reports a year of ice falling from aircraft, but probably the majority are natural meteorological phenomena."

In 1971 the roof of the Essex Church in Kensington, London, a Unitarian chapel, was seriously damaged by falling blue ice (hence crapulous); the building was already in poor repair, and this led to its eventual demolition. *BBC News, telegraph.co.uk, 9 July; Catholic Herald, 10 July 2012.*

BUNGALOW BULLSEYE

A lump of ice, probably from an aircraft wing, crashed through the roof of a bungalow in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, on 21 August 2012, and shattered across an elderly couple's living room floor. It punched a hole through the roof and the plastered ceiling about a foot in diameter. It wasn't

A-Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden

coloured blue by chemicals, so had not come from an aircraft 'comfort room'. Paul Walker, 76, a retired aerospace chemist, and his wife Deidre, 75, were about 10ft (3m) away from the point of impact when they heard a loud bang. The grandfather of three said: "It sounded like someone had pushed over a glass cabinet, it was an enormous bang followed by a crashing noise. It wasn't like anything I've ever heard before, which is not surprising really." *D.Telegraph, 22 Aug 2012.*

PLUMMETING PUPPY

A Californian boy got a new puppy after it fell out of the sky into his backyard. It was thought that the two-month-old pup had been picked up be a hawk and slithered from its talons. It was named T.J. Heavenly, after the child, Taylor Bouchard, who found it and probably saved its life. The animal was badly injured but made a full recovery. *MX News (Sydney), 17 May 2012. For plummeting fruit and veg, see* **FT285:10-11**.

IT'S RAINING WORMS

Here's a curious incident that we briefly mentioned in our falling-worm roundup (**FT276:24-25**). On 8 July 2007, large tangled clumps of earthworms fell from the sky on Jennings, Louisiana. They landed on police department employee Eleanor Beal and communications officer Martha Amie, and were squirming all over the street. "There were no clouds, we weren't under the poles or the trees and I couldn't believe it," said Ms Amie. "I just ran back inside because I didn't want any more to fall on my head." Their origin was a mystery; some locals blamed a waterspout that touched down around the same time near Lacassine Bayou, about five miles (8km) away. However, the National Weather Service couldn't say whether the two incidents were connected. *kpictv.com, 9 July; Metro, 10 July 2007.*

KLAUS RUDKOFF / BIOLIB.CZ

A SPINY SURPRISE

New Guinea is home to three species of long-beaked echidna or spiny anteater (all belonging to the genus *Zaglossus*) as well as to the much smaller, single species of short-beaked echidna (genus *Tachyglossus*). The last-mentioned species is the only echidna known to exist in Australia, for according to fossil evidence and ancient cave paintings, all of the long-beaks died out here during the late Pleistocene epoch, 30,000-40,000 years ago – a time when Australia and New Guinea were still a single land mass. Thanks to a unique but long-overlooked specimen lately uncovered in the collections of London's Natural History Museum, however, this traditionally accepted scenario appears to have been sensationally disrupted.

During a recent visit to the NHM, Smithsonian Institution zoologist Dr Kristofer Helgen found a skinned specimen of the western long-beaked echidna *Zaglossus bruijni* whose original data-tag totally astonished him. The tag revealed that this animal had been shot by Australian naturalist John Tunney in 1901, but not in New Guinea – instead, on Mount Anderson, a mountain in the vast, arid, sparsely-populated West Kimberley region of northwestern Australia! It had then been stuffed and sent to Lord Walter Rothschild's private natural history museum at Tring, and thence to London's NHM in 1939 two years after Lord Rothschild's death.

It was never studied at either museum, thus remaining in scientific obscurity for over a century, until Dr Helgen recognised its significance. This unremarkable-looking specimen is proof that a species of long-nosed echidna was still living in Australia until as recently as the early 20th century, and had not died out here many millennia ago after all. Dr Helgen is now hoping to launch an expedition to the area where Tunney had shot this specimen in search of a possible population of long-beaks. The omens for success are good: when local aboriginals there were questioned recently, they confirmed that their parents had hunted such a creature, which they positively identified from pictures shown to them. *www.pensoft.net/journals/zookeys/article/3774/abstract/modern-occurrence-of-the-long-beaked-echidna-zaglossus-bruijnii-in-the-kimberley-region-of-australia 28 Dec 2012.*

A JUMBO-SIZED REVELATION IN CHINA

As recently as 3,000 years ago, elephants were still living wild in northern China, which may come as something of a surprise to many people. But something far more surprising has now been revealed. It had long been assumed that these were Asian elephants *Elephas maximus*, because this familiar modern-day species still exists today in southern China. However, researches conducted by a team of scientists from Shaanxi Normal University and Northwest University in Xi'an and from the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research in Beijing have sensationally revealed that the northern China elephants actually belonged to an entirely separate, ostensibly long-extinct genus, *Palæoloxodon* – housing the straight-tusked elephants.

Until now, China's *Palæoloxodon* species (as yet unnamed) was thought to have died out at the Pleistocene-Holocene boundary, approximately 10,000 years ago. However, the Chinese team's findings indicate that it was still alive at least 7,000 years longer, into historic times – a veritable prehistoric survivor, in fact. The team's revelations were based upon their re-examination of 3,000-year-old fossil teeth hitherto believed to have been from *Elephas* but now recognised to belong to *Palæoloxodon*; and their reinterpretation of 33 northern Chinese elephant-shaped bronzes from the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties (c. 4,100-2,300 years ago) whose trunks all had two grasping finger-like digits, whereas the trunk of *E. maximus* only ever has one, thus suggesting that these bronzes may depict *Palæoloxodon* not *Elephas*. Not everyone agrees that this partial resurrection of *Palæoloxodon* in China is valid, however, so it is likely that the subject will attract further palæontological scrutiny for some time to come. *www.bbc.co.uk/nature/20678793 19 Dec 2012.*

POLICE AND THIEVES

The annals of crime and punishment continue to provide us with tales of incompetence and stupidity

CRETINOUS COPS

● A police constable alone on night shift spotted a mysterious silvery light beaming steadily from behind the Clent Hills in Worcestershire, an area notorious for 'dogging' (outdoor sex). Deciding to investigate, he called his sergeant to say he might need back up. However, 20 minutes later, the sheepish rookie was forced to call back and say the light source was actually the Full Moon. The incident, reported in *Police* magazine, is believed to have taken place on 31 August when there was a rare blue Moon. "The officer was a little reluctant to come back on duty the next day," said a police source. "He knew he was going to get a ribbing and he's had pictures of werewolves put on his locker by some of the more unforgiving officers. It will take a long time for him to live this one down." *D.Mail, Metro, 26 Sept 2012.*

● Another tale from *Police* magazine: a police officer in Stoke-on-Trent believed he had caught four men using duplicate passports after thinking all the suspects were named 'Abu Dhabi'. He had confused the names on the passports with the country from which they had flown. *Metro, D.Mirror, 28 Aug 2012.*

● Police in New Delhi helped scrap metal thieves steal an entire three-tonne bridge after falling for forged paperwork stating the crossing had been scheduled for demolition. *Metro, 25 Jan 2013.*

● A civilian police worker saw "PC World" written on a bundle of cash. It was evidence in an investigation into a raid on one of the computer firm's branches in Stockport, Greater Manchester. Taking it for the name of an officer dealing with the case, she put out a call for Police Constable World. *Sun, 16 Nov 2012.*

● Sent out to a disturbance in Hartlepool, Co. Durham, a junior policeman called his station: "It's the right address because I can see another panda car here." He only realised he was looking at a reflection of his own vehicle in a shop window when the radio controller said the correct location was half a mile away. *D.Mirror, 3 Sept 2012.*

OLIVIER SAIVE

Their getaway donkey started braying and alerted police

● A worried passer-by saw a swarm of bluebottles inside a vehicle in a car park in North Walsham, Norfolk, and called the police. Assuming the car contained a body, officers smashed the back window to gain access, but were embarrassed to discover the flies had hatched from maggots in a bait box amateur fisherman George Wallis (40) had left in the car four days earlier. Unable to contact Mr Wallis immediately, police arranged for the damaged Chrysler Neon to be towed to Great Yarmouth. The unfortunate fisherman was then told he would have to pay £150 towing fee and a £20-a-day storage charge. As he couldn't afford this, he faced a £75 fee for the car to be scrapped. A policeman suggested he appeal. *D.Telegraph, 26 Nov 2012.*

RUBBISH ROBBERS

● Homeland Security agents received a tip-off in mid-December about a cocaine deal at a Pizza Hut in Bellingham, near the Canadian border in Washington State. They set up surveillance and watched as an SUV with a personalised number plate reading S-M-U-G-L-E-R pulled in with a driver and two passengers. They followed it to the nearby Smuggler's Inn, a bed and breakfast joint with rooms called 'Al Capone' and 'DB Cooper'. The agents pulled the vehicle over and found a large box containing nine blocks of cocaine weighing nearly 24lb (11kg). One of the passengers, Jasmin Klair, 20, admitted responsibility and said that she had been told to book into a ground floor room facing Canada; she wanted the 'Captain's Room', about 150ft (45m) from the border. While being interviewed, she received texts from the two men who had given her the job, and was prevailed upon to beckon them to the Smuggler's Inn. Narminder Kaler and Gurjit Sandhu arrived within minutes and were busted. *usnews.msnbc.com, 20 Mar 2012.*

● On 4 July 2012, Matthew Warnes (29) rang the police to complain that thieves had made off with three of his cannabis plants from his home in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. The cops arrived and found three more plants, growing equipment, and bags with dried weed. Warnes was given a 26-week suspended sentence, ordered to do 150 hours of unpaid work, and pay £85 costs. Paul Kelly, 41, a more ambitious grower – who accidentally flooded a flat underneath his in Hadleigh, Suffolk, when water leaked downstairs – had 86 plants growing. Kelly, who lived in Chelmsford, rented the flat just to grow whacky backy. He went down for 18 months. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 6 Dec 2012.*

● Mizanur Rahman, had business cards reading "Drugs for sale – £15 for half a T." (T, apparently, stands for 'teenth', one 16th of an ounce.) They were found in the pocket of a pair of jeans at his home in Tredworth, Gloucestershire. He had been arrested with almost £600 of heroin and crack cocaine on 1 October 2011 when police noticed his car "parked oddly" in Gloucester. He was jailed for 27 months. Another 19-year-old, Benito Graffagnino, advertised Ecstasy online with his mobile telephone number. He was arrested after unwittingly agreeing to meet undercover

officers, and was sentenced to three years and three months in youth custody at Bristol Crown Court last September. *Metro, 21 Oct 2011; D.Telegraph, 12 Sept 2012.*

● Border Agency officers at Millbay docks in Plymouth, Devon, found what they believed to be 930lb (422kg) of cannabis resin in the van of David Cox, 63, and his stepdaughter Sian Shakespeare, 44. The smugglers thought it was hash too, and worth a million quid – but test showed that it was fake. We are not told what it actually was – OXO cubes? Fudge? Nonetheless, the hapless pair went down for seven and a half years! *D.Telegraph, 8 Sept 2012.*

● Undercover narcotics officers in Los Angeles observed a man making an apparent drug deal, and chased him as he drove the wrong way down several streets before obligingly crashing into the Los Angeles County Central Jail. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 1 Sept 2011.*

● Assistant city attorney Jason Cantrell (43) was arrested for cannabis possession and suspended from his job after a joint fell from his pocket in front of police in court in New Orleans on 1 October 2012. Cantrell's wife, LaToya, a candidate for New Orleans City Council, said she was "angry, embarrassed and disappointed" with her husband's actions. He had practised law in Louisiana for more than 16 years. *[R] 3 Oct 2012.*

● On New Year's Eve, Peter Welsh (32) and Dwayne Doolan (31) tried to break into a jewellers in the Australian town of Beaudesert by throwing spark plugs at the window, but failed to break the glass. Next, they tried to break in by the rear doors, but ended up in a neighbouring charity shop. Then they broke into a lavatory at the rear of the shops, and hacked a hole in the wall with an iron bar, creating a small tunnel through which they crawled. Instead of the jewellers', however, they found themselves in the Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant next door. Deciding to make the best of a bad job, they threatened the staff with the iron bar and escaped with A$2,600 (£1,700) in cash from the safe. They were soon apprehended. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, D.Mail, 4 Jan 2013.*

● Three Colombians who tried to burgle a convenience store had to abandon the 2am raid when their getaway donkey started braying, alerting police. They had loaded their haul of rum, oil, rice, cans of tuna and sardines on the 10-year-old donkey, called Xavi, which they had stolen 12 hours earlier in the northern Colombian town of Juan de Acosta. They ditched the donkey, which was detained by police until collected by its owner, Orland Olivares. All the stolen items were recovered. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 22 Jan 2013.*

● Siegfried Koenig (57), brandishing a toy pistol, tried to hold up a bank that had closed 17 years earlier. He stormed into the building in Osnabruck, Germany – now a physiotherapy clinic with a cash machine outside – grabbed a hostage and demanded 10,000 euros (£8,567). Realising his mistake, he ordered a passer-by to withdraw 400 euros (£343) from the cash machine and made off in a stolen car. He later abandoned the vehicle, but left the plastic pistol, covered with his fingerprints, between the seats. He was jailed for seven years and dubbed "Germany's dumbest bank robber". *(Sydney) Sunday Telegraph, 4 Dec 2011.*

● Dana Leland (29), who used counterfeit $100 bills to buy small items at a store in North Attleborough, Rhode Island, made a crucial mistake – the notes carried a picture of President Lincoln, whereas real $100 bills portray Benjamin Franklin. Lincoln is on the $5 bill. Leland was held on $1,000 cash bail after pleading not guilty. *[AP] 15 Nov 2012.*

● A thief was arrested after being grassed up by the robotic lawnmower he stole. Keith Herron, 30, broke into a car after stealing the Clever Trevor gadget, which sent out SOS signals in Northallerton, North Yorkshire. *Metro, 6 Sept 2012.*

● Toothless and bald Carl Ascot (40) got a suspended jail sentence for stealing a toothbrush and shampoo in Truro, Cornwall. *Sun, 19 Jan 2013.*

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

PÆDOPHILE PRIME MINISTER MYTHS

GETTY IMAGES

One of the recurring themes in the conspirasphere is the notion that the rich and powerful of the Western world are pædophiles. Thus Tony Gosling, the UK's leading researcher on Bilderberg, in an e-mail bulletin (and come-on for a Webcast) in January: "Was BBC presenter Jimmy Savile procuring Haut de la Garenne children's home boys in Jersey for former Prime Minister Ted Heath to sexually abuse on his boat *Morning Cloud* and were these victims subsequently murdered?"

I didn't hear the broadcast, but I suspect he was discussing the material that appeared online on 15 January. [1] Since the 'evidence' therein is merely anonymous allegations, this has no value and would never have seen the light of day before the coming of the Internet. However, the allegations include the claim that Heath was warned repeatedly by the police about his 'cottaging' activities, which is implausible in the extreme. It is implausible, firstly, that, as Prime Minister, Heath would have found it possible to do such a thing (PMs have almost no private time and are accompanied by bodyguards wherever they go); even less plausible is that the knowledge of such activities was not used to oust him (I heard variations on the same theme in 1975 from a friend of my father's who had worked for the Conservative Party). The article also claims that Heath abused some of the inmates of the Kincora Boy's Home in Belfast. Thus we see two of the themes which were being used by MI5's disinformation project of the mid-1970s, 'Clockwork Orange': namely, that Edward Heath was gay and the abuse of boys by the rich and powerful was taking place at the Kincora Boys Home. [2]

According to one Michael James, Gordon Brown was another such pædophile Prime Minister. [3] After repeating allegations that Peter Mandelson had a role in "the kidnapping of young girls and boys for the 'pleasuring' of the European elite commissioners in Brussels," James tells us that Brown's pædophile activities were revealed to him by Conservative minister Norman Lamont in 1986 and "are known not only to the British, American and Israeli intelligence services, but also by Rupert Murdoch and his senior editor at the *Sunday Times*."

If we accept this tale as true, it's striking that James should have accepted at face value an allegation about a Labour politician by a Conservative one without apparently wondering if it might simply be derogatory gossip.

Nor is this theme confined to the British sector of the conspirasphere. Joel van der Reijden, who runs a large and interesting website on the world's elite managers, [4] includes a section on child abusers in his recent study of 9/11, commenting that: "Most readers of this article will probably have noticed that the same persons suspected of involvement in the 9/11 event can often also be tied to accusations of participation in child abuse networks." Not only are the 'ties' extremely tenuous, he does his case no good by including the allegations of one Kay Griggs, who in 1998 named an improbably large number of senior US military and politicians as being child abusers. [5]

There is no evidence for any of these allegations on the Internet. This material is almost entirely invented and then endlessly recycled by people who find it interesting. But what, I leave you to ponder, do these fantasies about pædophilia and our political elites signify?

1 http://21stcenturywire.com/2012/10/15/jimll-fix-it-alright-as-paedophile-and-provider-in-the-corridors-of-power/

2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clockwork_Orange_(plot)

3 http://rense.com/general89/brownpd.htm

4 https://wikispooks.com/ISGP/about.htm)

5 http://wikispooks.com/ISGP/911/911_WTC_part_2_who_did_it.htm

NECROLOG

BOB RICKARD waves off the Czech Republic's real-life Indiana Jones, whose numerous adventures took him to the Gobi Desert, Siberia's 'Valley of Death' and Dracula's castle

IVAN MACKERLE

The Czech Republic's foremost fortean adventurer has died, aged 71. He had been ill for some time and succumbed during a cardiac operation. Ivan Mackerle's fame spread far beyond his native Slovakia as a writer and broadcaster who combined the vision of Erich von Daniken and the legend of Indiana Jones with a practicality that matched the world's greatest explorers. He was remarkable not just for the range of his expeditions but also because these ambitious projects were largely self-funded.

In his own tribute to Ivan, the cryptozoologist Karl Shuker wrote that Ivan "will be remembered above all else for his diligent, ground-breaking trio of expeditions to the Gobi Desert in search of the terrifying Mongolian death worm or *allghoi khorkhoi*. Today, it is unquestionably one of the world's most famous cryptids, yet it was virtually unknown to the West before Ivan first brought it to widespread popular attention via a *World Explorer* article in 1994."

"During more than four decades of investigations worldwide," Dr Shuker notes, "Ivan sought a wide range of cryptids, including the Alpine *tatzelworm* and Tappenkarsee *lindworm*, the New Guinea *ropen*, the Loch Ness monster, the *thylacine* on mainland Australia, the Brazilian *troa*, the Sri Lankan *nittæwo*, and even Madagascar's giant elephant bird and man-eating tree. And although, sadly, he never succeeded in encountering any of his ultra-elusive quarries, he gathered considerable quantities of very valuable anecdotal and hitherto unpublicised background information for each one."

Besides these cryptozoological goals, Ivan had a considerable catalogue of classic fortean objectives including the fate of the lost Amazonian explorer Percy Fawcett; Dracula's castle; the singing fishes of Batticaola; the mysterious 'cauldrons' in Siberia's Valley of Death, the submerged ruins off the Micronesian island of Ponape; entrances to the mythical subterranean kingdom of Agharta; and the legendary Tuerin (Tchoirin) monastery in Mongolia. As Dr Shuker attests in his tribute, Ivan meticulously recorded his adventures and findings and was generous in sharing them with his colleagues, including ourselves at *FT*.

Ivan Mackerle was born in March 1942 in Plzni (Pilsen), where his father Julius was a noted automobile designer. When he was three, the family moved to Prague; at age five, to Moravia; and, aged 16, back to Prague – as his father changed employer. Prague remained his home for the rest of his life.

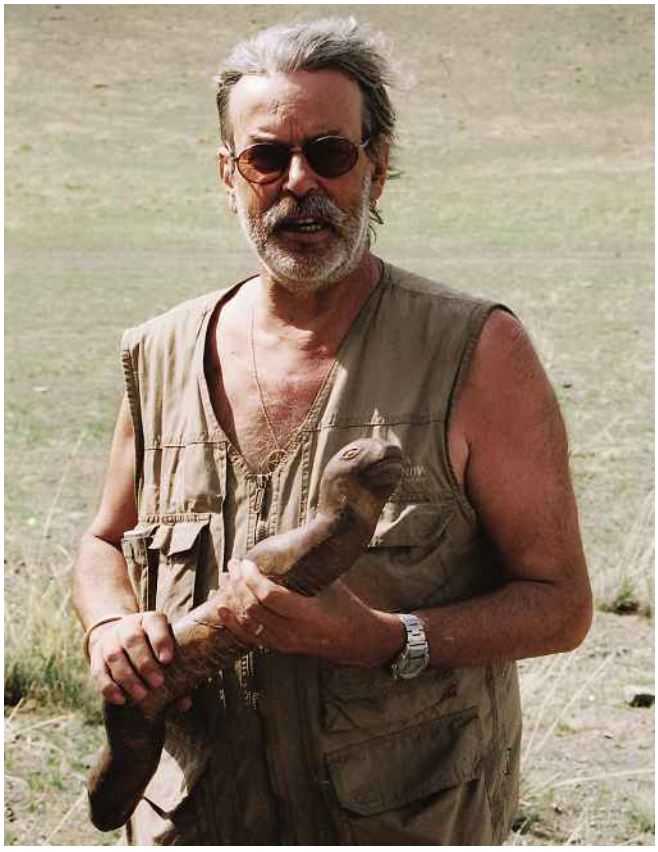
His lifelong interest in exploration was formed in boyhood, reading adventure books and magazines. He had to secretly borrow literature on 'scouting' as the Communist regime had banned it. Regardless, he and six friends formed their own scouting group – called the Fast Arrows – with a "secret clubhouse equipped with a radio for practising Morse code" until they were raided by police. Later he developed a keen interest in zoology (collecting newsclippings on yeti encounters, etc) and electronics, but chose to specialise in automotive engineering at the Czech Technical University in Prague, from which he graduated.

By the age of 20 he had worked as a designer, and then as manager, for the General Directorate of Czechoslovak Cars; and had married Ivonou Paličkovou and had a son, Danny. In his spare time he began to experiment first with 8mm and then 16mm film, making amateur fiction adventures. He also had a passion for off-road and historical military vehicles, his favourite being a World War II amphibious Volkswagen 166, which he and Danny lovingly restored.

Underneath it all, his passion for mysterious and unexplained phenomena grew, fed by news and literature from all over the world that trickled in as the old restrictions and barriers weakened and collapsed. For example, Ivan credits the writings of the French writer and mysteriographer Jacques Bergier for introducing him to the legend of the ancient Mongolian monastery of Tuerin, said to be one of the entrances to Agharta and built over the tomb of a visitor from the stars. It became one of many research files in his private office, alongside others on strange phenomena, haunted castles and poltergeists – some of which he managed to investigate.

Between 1980 and 1990 he began local and regional investigations of interesting and accessible cases with a colleague, Michael Brumlíkem. Together, they developed and presented a series of innovative audiovisual lectures on fascinating places and unsolved mysteries for which they became well known. Interviewed by Sam Beckwith for the *Prague.TV* magazine in 2005, Ivan remembered the day his life changed in December 1989. He was standing in Wenceslas Square with his photographer friend Jiří Skupien, during one of the Velvet Revolution's massive demonstrations. "Now we can go to Mongolia," he told Skupien.

After the coup in 1989, Ivan – often accompanied by his son Danny and Skupien – took advantage of the new freedom to organise expeditions to various parts of the world, principally to 'solve a mystery' but also to gather material for articles and



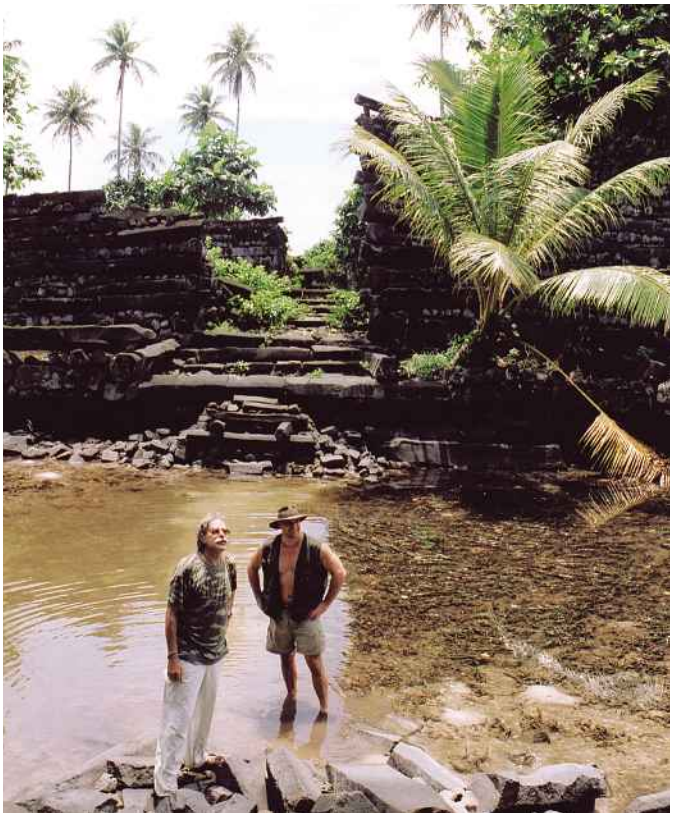
ABOVE: Ivan with a wooden carving of the Mongolian death worm.

presentations. From 1998 to 2000 he worked in television as an expert consultant to the Prima series *Záhady a mystéria* (Enigmas and Mysteries). He was also chairman of the editorial board of the journal *Fantastická fakta* (Fantastic Facts) (1998-2002).

As an independent researcher and freelance journalist, Ivan's sphere of interests grew to include 'archæo-astronautics', cryptozoology, historical mysteries, parapsychology and occultism; and he continued to organise expeditions, chronicling them in books and documentary films. Increasingly, there was demand, too, for his articles in 'foreign' periodicals like *Fate* and *Fortean Times*. We had an opportunity to observe his dedication to his projects in 2008, when he gave a presentation to FT's *UnConvention* on his search for the homegrown Czech legend of 'the Golem of Prague' [**FT238:30-37, 244:39**].

In 2012, a few months before his death, Ivan gave an extensive interview to the Czech media magazine *Zivot*. Asked how he decided on his expeditions, he said: "Its mystery is enough. What is 'unknown' has to grab the heart."

Asked if he had ever been afraid during his journeys to remote corners of the world, far from cell phones and the prospect of rescue, Ivan acknowledged that he and members of his teams often had such moments. He said that during the search for the long-dispersed remains of the Tuerin Monastery they met with superstitious reservation and hostility by local tribesmen who blamed outbreaks of disease and calamity on 'archæologists' (spoken as synonymous with robbers) who disturbed the 'holy' ground. "Many unwelcome people try to find the underground kingdom," one lama warned Ivan. "Most of them fail; some disappear forever. Only a destined one can reach the holy place, when his karma is ready." Ivan took the words to heart and prudently halted the expedition. "I could not say if our karma would allow us to break into a holy crypt, but I had a foreboding. We were four poor Europeans, travelling without permission, and without weapons to defend ourselves. In the end, we decided not to play with fire." On other occasions, sitting around a campfire in the kind of darkness you can only find in a true wilderness, it is the imagination that can 'unman' an explorer. "There is always danger from bandits or natives, but the supernatural is harder to resist."



TOP: Ivan with his son Danny at Nan Madol, Ponape. **ABOVE**: Round the campfire.

After a life packed with adventure, did Ivan have any regrets? He told *Zivot* that there was an element of sadness when they never found some mythical animal, like the Mongolian Death Worm, but it was always a great adventure if they met people with stories of their experiences and came back with useful data. Ivan has developed a sort of pragmatism that seems to clash with the faith the cryptozoologists have invested in the creature. "The strange thing is," he told *Zivot*, "that there are individual reports from different parts of the Gobi; they all describe the same worm. Lamas also knew about it, but claimed that it was a demon of the desert, something supernatural and not of flesh and blood. Today, I'm not quite so sure that it was an animal. I am inclined to believe that it is something from another world, possibly from some 'augmented reality' reachable only through shamanic rituals."

The arduous conditions during many of his expeditions took their toll on Ivan's health, and he often fell seriously ill in the midst of them, sometimes dwelling on some mysterious aspect of the illness. He told *Zivot* that his "heart problems" meant that his days of "wandering around the jungle and carrying heavy backpacks" were over, but he had always encouraged his son Danny to explore, to seek out mysteries and perhaps learn something. An example, he said, came during their trip to New Guinea, looking for the *ropen*, a long-tailed 'flying lizard' some think might be a pterosaur survivor. Whatever it was had dug up corpses from the ground and glowed with phosphorescence. The situation was quite conducive to supernatural interpretation despite having a natural explanation.

Ivan lived as he believed: "Mysteries are a way into the inner man, to a state of consciousness," he said. "How one lives and what one experiences is important. It's a spiritual issue." We shall miss his unique, bold, generous and inquiring example and give thanks for his lasting legacy of fortean adventures.

Danny confirmed to *FT* that his father's work will be continued. On the cards are an expedition to Madagascar seeking signs of the *kalanoro*, a mysterious and diminutive humanoid; and a return to Papua New Guinea in search of the *ropen*.

Ivan Mackerle, Czech engineer and fortean explorer, born Plzni, Bohemia, 12 Mar 1942; died Prague 3 Jan 2013, aged 71.

SOURCES

http://en.mackerle.cz/

http://karlshuker.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/goodbye-ivan-my-tribute-to-ivan.html

http://prague.tv/articles/zine/ivan-mackerle-interview

BOTH PICS: SIGNS AND WONDERS / IVAN MACKERLE

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

All the latest fortean news updates, including another devoted dog and a cemetery cat.

DOGGED DEVOTION [FT297:24]

When his mistress died last November, Ciccio, a 12-year-old German shepherd, followed her coffin to the Santa Assunta church in the village of San Donaci, in the Pugia region of southern Italy. According to the local priest, Donato Panna, every day in the subsequent two months, when the church bells begin to ring in the afternoon, Ciccio has headed to the church just as he did for years when his mistress was alive. He sits through masses, baptisms and funerals in the front row near the altar. His mistress – who was known in local dialect as 'Maria tu lu campu' (Maria of the fields) – had lived alone with Ciccio and three other rescue dogs, who used to follow her on her daily rounds. They have been adopted by the village. Curiously, the Australian papers call the dog 'Tommy' – which doesn't look like a translation of Ciccio. *D.Telegraph (London), MX News (Sydney), 17 Jan; Adelaide Advertiser, 18 Jan 2013.* [*D.Telegraph*]

• A cat has been visiting his owner's grave every day for a year since the man died in September 2011. Toldo, now three, joined the funeral procession for Renzo Iozzelli, 71. Toldo, who lives with Renzo's relatives in Montagnana, northern Italy, miaows beside his headstone for at least an hour a day. Ada, Renzo's widow explained: "Every day he brings little twigs, leaves, toothpicks, plastic cups. But there are insensitive people who send him away with stones, convinced that his presence in the cemetery is almost a desecration." *Sun, Huffington Post, 4 Jan 2013*

HIGH SEAS DRIFTERS [FT271:8]

On 27 May 2012, Toakai Teitoi, 41, flew from his home island of Maiana in the Kiribati island group to the Kiribati capital of Tarawa, in order to be sworn in as a policeman. Instead of flying home, he joined his brother-in-law Lelu Falaile, 52, in his 18ft (5.4m) fishing boat on what was supposed to be a two-hour trip back to Maiana; but after stopping to fish along the way and sleeping overnight, they woke to find they had drifted out of sight of Maiana, and soon ran out of fuel. They had food, but nothing to drink. Falaile died of dehydration on 4 July, and Teitoi buried him at sea. Only a day later, a storm blew up and it rained for several days, allowing Teitoi to fill two five-gallon (23-litre) containers with water. Most days he curled up under a small covered area in the bow to stay out of the tropical sun. He woke one afternoon to the sound of scratching and looked overboard to see a 6ft (1.8m) shark circling the boat and bumping the hull. When the shark had his attention, it swam off. "He was guiding me to a fishing boat," said Teitoi. "I could see crew with binoculars looking at me." The fishing boat took him to Majuro in the Marshall Islands. He had drifted more than 2,000 miles (3,200km) in 106 days. *D.Telegraph, 15 Sept; Sky News, 17 Sept 2012.*

In 2005-06, three Mexicans allegedly drifted 5,500 miles (8,800km) across the Pacific in 289 days before their rescue near Baker Island north of Australia, although some doubted their story (**FT215:5, 222:12**). Fishermen from the Kiribati island group seem particularly at risk from such involuntary adventures: three survived drifting for 119 days in 1986, two for 175 days in 1992, two for 150 days in 1997, and three for 46 days in 2005. Three sailors spent 119 days adrift on their capsized trimaran off New Zealand in 1989, while in 1997 two Russians spent almost six months adrift in the Indian Ocean. In 2010, three boys from the Tokelau islands in the Pacific were rescued after drifting about 800 miles (1,300km) in 48 days. (**FT48:16, 53:18, 64:6, 100:7, 105:9, 198:9**).

ORDINARY DELIGHTS [FT290:6]

The third annual Boring Conference – dedicated to the delights of the mundane, obvious and overlooked, and held on 25 November 2012 in Bethnal Green, east London – was a sell-

out, with 500 (or 1,200) tickets going for £20 each. James Ward, 31, who founded the event in 2010, gave a 20-minute talk entitled 'Unexpected Item in the Bagging Area', a history of self-checkout machines. Other topics included the relative heights of celebrities, letterboxes, toast, fridges, and the features of a keyboard. Kathy Clugston, a Radio 4 announcer, discussed the shipping forecast. Leila Johnston confessed that she photographs IBM cash registers and plots them on a Google map. A boring buffet was laid on: bowls of undressed iceberg lettuce, cucumber chunks on sticks, piles of white sliced bread, dry crackers and label-free bottles of tap water. *D.Telegraph, 15 Nov; Guardian, 26 Nov 2012.*

• Readers will be fascinated to learn that on 6 June 2012 the town of Boring, Oregon, voted in favour of becoming a "sister community" to the Scottish hamlet of Dull in Perthshire. A new road sign to mark the relationship was unveiled in Dull on 23 June. *D.Telegraph, 7 June; Scotland on Sunday, 24 June 2012.*

FERAL CHILD [FT294:24]

Following the five-year-old girl found living with cows in the Urals last July, another bleak case: a 13-year-old boy found naked and cowering in a cowshed, where his parents had kept him for his entire life. Vasily Makeyev was said to be starving, filthy and almost blind when neighbours discovered him in Chernyavsky, in the Belgorod region of western Russia. The family's other three children lived normally in their house while Vasily was left alone through harsh winters in the dark cowshed, where he would hug a calf to keep from freezing. "We have heard the plaintive cries and howls at night" said a neighbour. "But who knew there was a child in there?" Vasily, who was put in the care of social services, was reported to be mentally impaired and barely able to speak. Police said his parents, Andrey (44) and Maria (41), had refused an offer for him to be put into care because they didn't want to give up state benefits for looking after him. *D.Mail, D.Express, 23 Nov 2012.*

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Donna Lange, 51, faced manslaughter charges after allegedly smothering her boyfriend to death with her breasts during a drunken fight at their mobile home in Everett, Washington State, on 12 January. Witnesses heard the couple arguing on two occasions that evening, with 192lb (87kg) Lange throwing her partner (also aged 51) to the floor during one incident. They claim she then lay on the victim with "her chest on his face". At 5ft 7in (1.7m), the victim stood an inch taller than Lange, but he was 17lb (7.7kg) lighter. What appeared to be hair the same colour as Lange's was clutched in the corpse's hand. Lange, who was very drunk and received facial injuries in the disturbance, told police she had no idea how the man had died. Three other people at the scene were also so drunk they could not help police either. A hack at the *Sun* couldn't resist the headline: "Knock-knock-knockers on heaven's door".

Last November, a German woman was accused of trying to kill her lawyer boyfriend with her 38DD breasts. Franziska Hansen, 33, from Unna, who weighs 126lb (57kg), was accused of "attempted manslaughter with a weapon" after Tim Schmidt, who weighs 182lb (83kg), claimed she tried to smother him with her breasts and pretend it was a sex game. He said that with his last reserves of strength he had extricated himself from her vice-like grip and fled naked to a neighbour, demanding he called the police. He said Hansen tried to kill him after learning he was planning to leave her. *Sun, 15 Jan; D.Mail, 16 Jan 2013.*

A Tunisian man died after eating 28 raw eggs in one sitting while trying to win a bet. Dhaou Fatnassi, 20, from the town of Kairouan, felt acute stomach pains and was rushed to hospital, but was pronounced dead on arrival. He had made the wager with friends to eat 30 raw eggs for an undisclosed sum of money. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 28 Dec; D.Mirror, 29 Dec 2012.*

Indian tea plantation owner Mridul Kumar Bhattacharyya and his wife Rita were burnt alive after their bungalow was attacked by up to 1,000 workers following a labour dispute in the Tinsukia district of Assam. The mob, which police said was dominated by women and children, later told police their employers had deserved to die and dared officers to arrest them. "Our investigations say at least five plantation workers ate the flesh of the tea planter and his wife after they were brutally killed," said deputy police chief Numol Mahatao. Police superintendent PP Singh announced: "We cannot take this hanky-panky." *D.Telegraph, 28 Dec 2012; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 3 Jan 2013.*

Sarah Short, 48, found her 16-year-old son Connor dying after a head-on car crash at the same spot as his father was killed eight years earlier. The crash happened on 20 September in Ashover, Derbyshire, where David Short was killed aged 41 as he walked. *D.Express, 28 Sept 2012.*

Andrew Evans, 35, was found dead in his kitchen on 10 May 2012 – standing up. He had earlier injured his head, but might not have realised how serious it was because he was four times over the drink-drive limit. It is believed he blacked out before collapsing against the kitchen fittings at his house in East Grinstead, West Sussex, with his hand reaching into a cupboard. The coroner described his death in May – caused by asphyxiation of the lungs – as 'bizarre'. *Sun, MX News (Sydney), 21 Dec 2012.*

Daniela Weiss and Daniel Oelter, both 38, spent five years travelling round the world, visiting some of the most dangerous areas in the Middle East and Asia; but two days after returning home, they were fatally struck by a train just yards from their flat in Granichen, Switzerland. *Sun, 1 Sept 2012.*

A man painting a tower block in Mumbai, India, fell 150ft (46m) to his death when an eagle attacked him for wrecking its nest. *Sun, 14 Oct 2012.*

John Wild was 'mad' about peanut butter and had safely eaten peanuts all his life; but he died on Christmas Eve when he suddenly developed an allergy to them and went into anaphylactic shock. His throat closed up after snacking on peanuts in his bedroom. The 29-year-old golf course green keeper was found collapsed on the floor at home in Lymington, Hampshire. *D.Mirror, 12 Jan 2013.*

THE FORTEAN TIMES BOOK OF STRANGE DEATHS VOL 2

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FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

UFOS: THE BOOTLEG FILES

The theme for this month's Flyingsaucery is UFOs on film and TV. Two iconic moments from UFO history are featured in blogger Phil Hall's *Bootleg Files* listing of "memorable films and TV productions" that exist only in unofficial formats. The first is Nick Mariana's famous 16mm colour footage of two luminous, silvery-white UFOs moving horizontally against a blue summer sky above a baseball stadium in Great Falls, Montana, in the summer of 1950. The film is only 16 seconds in length but quickly became a classic both in terms of its status as photographic evidence and as the centre of a long-running controversy. It was examined by both the US Air Force and Navy who tried, unsuccessfully, to explain the phenomena as light reflecting from aircraft or birds. Mariana went on to claim 35 frames of evidential footage was removed from his film by the Air Force, but this has never been proved. A print survives in the US National Archives but as Mariana never copyrighted his footage clips regularly appear in TV productions, on YouTube and elsewhere.

The second piece of visual UFO history listed by Hall is the Universal Pictures made-for-TV film *The UFO Incident*. This tells the story of the iconic Betty and Barney Hill alien abduction that was brought to public attention by John Fuller's book *The Interrupted Journey* in 1966. Hall calls the film, premiered in the US on NBC-TV in October 1975, "one of the most memorable of the genre." Bootleg versions can be found on YouTube and elsewhere but it has never been released by Universal on either VHS or DVD. Given the longevity of the Hill legend this is strange; because, as Hall points out, the film is unusual for two reasons. Firstly, it was a landmark in that it was the first such film to feature an interracial couple in a context that was not specifically about race relations. Barney was played by James Earl Ray, and Betty by a highly-strung Estelle Parsons, but the low-budget aliens don't show up until late in the film. Secondly, despite its extra-terrestrial theme, the film was not presented as science fiction but as a psychological mystery that follows the Hills' attempts to come to terms with what happened to them on that dark New Hampshire road in 1961.

So whether you believe the Hills met real aliens or entered what Carl Sagan described as "a spaceship of the mind", we agree with Hall that *The UFO Incident* is a film "well worth examining and pondering" as a piece of social history.

Film Threat review of Mariana footage: www.filmthreat.com/features/60155/
The UFO Incident: www.filmthreat.com/features/61090/

THE MAURY MOVIE

During 1947's so-called 'Summer of the Saucers', several events took place in the USA that have become enshrined as key moments in the creation of the UFO myth. The most notable are the Kenneth Arnold sighting, which gave rise to the term 'flying saucers', and the Roswell Incident which laid the foundations for the canon of flying saucer crash retrieval narratives. But there was one other, lesser-known event which predates Arnold or Roswell, the story of which is now being made into a feature film. The Maury Island Incident took place three days before Arnold's seminal saucer sighting, on 21 June, and both the event and its aftermath are a miasma of claim and counter claim which are best unravelled on one of the many Internet sites dealing with the case. Basically, one Harold Dahl claimed that he saw six UFOs near Maury Island in the state of Washington, one of which dropped some form of debris onto his boat, killing his dog and injuring his son. Dahl retrieved the debris and told no one; but the following morning he was visited by a black-suited mystery man driving a brand new car and claiming to be a government agent. Dahl was warned against publicly divulging the details of his sighting, the first example of the long running Men In Black strand within ufology. The saga gets much more complicated and involves Kenneth Arnold, the intelligence services and claims of cover-up. Many UFO writers, including the head of Project Blue Book, Captain Edward J Ruppelt, believe that the Maury Island Incident was a hoax, but the event and its ramifications became firmly embedded in saucer history in seminal books such as Arnold's *The Coming of the Saucers*, published by Ray Palmer in 1952. If it was a hoax then it deserves intense study for what it tells us about how UFO folklore developed from 1947 onwards. Either way, if done well it would make a cracking film, containing as it does every major element of what became ufology.

www.mauryislandincident.com/
www.kobobooks.com/ebook/The-Coming-Saucers-Kenneth-Arnold/book-LpzE9qU5PkOd42uO2zMh0w/page1.html

SAUCER-CRASH IN BRAZIL?

Most crashed flying saucer stories are drawn from the realms of wishful thinking and the fantastical. Here's one that's not. On 18 January, in Brazil's Fiera de Santana, a flying saucer-shaped office building crashed on to a passing car. The building, one of a handful of structures in the world created to look like the popular perception of a UFO, had stood for 30 years and was a popular local attraction.

http://beforeitsnews.com/awesome-time-wasters/2013/01/flying-saucer-crash-crushes-car-2446206.html

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES EXAMINES THE LINKS BETWEEN MIGRAINES, ELECTRICAL STORMS AND UFOS

STORM WARNINGS

MUSTAFA OZER / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

"I always know when there's a storm coming," Ellen, a local social worker, told me in a recent conversation. "I get a pain in my neck that moves upward and turns into a rotten migraine. Only on that day there was no storm – just a UFO."

Her UFO sighting last year proved of limited interest, being just an orange ball of light floating out to sea near her Conwy home. It may have been a fire lantern (as many reported UFOs are these days) and, if so, then this headache was likely coincidence. Yet her story about pre-storm headaches struck a chord with me, because I have had a lifelong battle with powerful migraines.

After decades of sampling various medications, even acting as a guinea pig for medical experiments that flashed red lights into my eyes hoping to change brain wave patterns and eradicate the symptoms, I had also been getting odd looks after telling people since childhood that I knew when an electric storm was brewing because I could 'feel it' in the upper back right of my neck.

Now both Ellen and myself have a degree of vindication, because Professor Vincent T Martin from the University of Cincinnati internal medical college has published the results of a study into such claims in the February 2013 edition of the medical journal *Cephalalgia*. This research correlated the detailed diaries of 90 migraine sufferers aged 18 to 65 in Ohio and Missouri with the results from eight meteorological sensors placed in these same locations. They recorded not just every lightning strike but their levels of intensity over a six-month period. The findings showed that up to 31 per cent more headaches and 28 per cent more severe migraines were reported if a lightning strike occurred that day within a 25-mile radius of the sufferer.

This is the first data to support what has been a seemingly common belief that migraines can be triggered by the presence nearby of imminent electrical storms. Martin suggests that there are several possible reasons, but cites the options that electromagnetic radiation spreading from lightning strikes or ozone generated in the local atmosphere by the burst of energy are potential candidates. Both can affect biochemistry or neurological circuits that may be sensitive in migraine patients. His data also revealed a 19 per cent direct increase correlated with the lightning strike alone.

Earlier evidence suggests that changes in barometric pressure prior to the onset of the storm can create escalating symptoms akin to the altered sensory impressions (or 'aura') that often precede a full migraine. This supports both Ellen and my own perception of a gradual, rising pressure in the neck and back of the head that turns into a powerful migraine over a period of a few hours.

All of this is interesting if you suffer from regular migraines, as roughly 12 per cent of the population do (more commonly women, for reasons suspected to be hormonal; in fact, 91 per cent of the participants in Martin's study were female). But what is the connection to UFOs?

> "My van was followed by an evil-looking black cloud"

Well, consider what a witness from Swansea has posted on sciforums.com. Noting that "many people get headaches at the approach of thunderstorms, myself included" the poster had never given it much thought until one very clear night in 1986 when driving on a lonely back road near Haverfordwest. Suddenly, "my van was followed by the most evil-looking thick black cloud". It was hovering a few hundred metres above the ground and moved alongside. As it did so, the witness felt a bad headache and a strange sensation, almost like being watched or as if something was trying to speak inside the driver's head. These odd sensations all vanished when the hovering mass disappeared, but for a couple of days a vague sense of unease remained.

This kind of story is not rare in UFO records. Another example reported to me occurred on 3 August 1988 and has become the subject of a detailed local investigation by Clive Potter. Two witnesses – a man and a woman – were driving home near Little Hayward on Cannock Chase in Staffordshire after a late night meeting when they saw a floating misty shape at close quarters. Gloria described it as: "a big cloud on the floor – all red and lit up". It was fluorescent and pulsated and seemed denser in the middle with a vaporous edge. Her friend, Reg – helpfully, a power station engineer – added that it was: "like a gas cloud... like if you look through a fluorescent tube." He was able to observe it and confirm that it was self-luminous and floated above the ground, heading north before vanishing.

Site samples and field studies were conducted by a number of scientists that we drafted in – such as meteorologist Dr Terence Meaden and plant biologist Dr Michele Clare. These showed that damaged branches found in the area were likely the result of a twisting energy vortex. Ionisation of atmospheric gases occurred, much as during a thunderstorm, although no storm was present. However, weather data showed that a clearing frontal system was sweeping through that night and there was heavy dewy drizzle in the air. Significantly, this presence of water vapour was a reason why the red coloration was probably noticed. In dry air when ozone is created, more bluish discharges are typical from the electrical breakdown. But the hydrogen atoms in water vapour can shift the appearance more towards red end of the spectrum – though not typically by this much.

As for physiological effects, Reg had only noticed an eerie silence. Gloria reported this, too, but interestingly was more deeply effected and spoke of strange sensations in her head that made her "feel weird" and left her with a deep sense of unease and some changes in her thought process and level of consciousness that do resemble a pre-migraine aura.

Another interesting feature of this case was the discovery that the area had an association with strange glows and clouds. For example, just north of this spot a column of white light was seen emerging upward from the ground at Oulton, rather like lightning in reverse. Another couple driving on the Chase (before Gloria and Reg went public) also told me of their terrifying experience when the air from their car was suddenly sucked out and their heads started to feel strange. A whooshing noise and a red glow then moved upwards from their vehicle and sped away over the Chase. Close by, there is a picturesque spot with the name Hell Hole, a term which often suggests an old reputation for supernaturally attributed 'goings on'.

As you can see, Professor Martin's finding that susceptible people can experience the onset of migraine-like symptoms when in modest proximity to ozone, electrical discharge and atmospheric energy breakdown may have implications beyond the search for effective treatment of a common debilitating condition or new ways to predict imminent local storms.

If some UFOs are, as I believe, a form of UAP – unidentified atmospheric phenomenon – and emit similar energies, then they would be expected to exhibit potentially even stronger physiological effects on those in close proximity. Understanding the physics involved, or indeed the medical background of the percipients and their differing responses to such a UAP, might help us to identify the nature of these aerial phenomena or their focus in 'hot spot' locations.

SD TUCKER asks who, or what, could possibly have been behind the supposed invasion of Liverpool by leprechauns in 1964 – was it elves, aliens, mass hysteria or even Ken Dodd?

INVASION OF T

HE DIDDYMEN!

The sedate sport of bowls does not often make headlines in the British press. One exception to this rule, however, came in the *Liverpool Echo* for 2 July 1964, in which the immortal line "Leprechauns Go Bowling in the Park" appeared. According to the report which followed, literally "thousands" of children from the Kensington area of Liverpool, in the east of the city, had taken leave of their senses the previous day and gone on a mad rampage through Jubilee Park in Jubilee Lane, hunting for leprechauns after someone – nobody really knows who – had reported seeing "little green men in white hats throwing stones and tiny clods of earth at one another" on the park's bowling green the previous night. It appears that this rumour had got abroad amongst the area's youths throughout that day in the local schools and built up to some kind of crescendo, as no sooner had the school-bells rung than hordes of kids began high-tailing it down to the park, desperate to be the first one to catch hold of a real, live leprechaun.

These children, who ranged in age from "tiny tots to 14-year-olds", according to the *Echo*, caused quite a bit of damage and bother. They ran through bushes, pulled up plants, scaled walls, got into empty houses in the vicinity, hurled stones, and generally made the entire park into a no-go area for anyone not still in short trousers. Matters got so bad that the police had to be called in to shoo them away.

Parks constable James Nolan – an Irishman, according to the report – was quoted as saying that "I don't believe in leprechauns myself", but he still saw fit to call in reinforcements. Before long, police in squad cars and on motorcycles arrived on the scene, clearing hundreds of excited boys and girls from off the bowling green and locking the gates. The police stood guard outside this barrier, but this simply had the effect of pushing the problem out elsewhere; the children just began climbing up on top of nearby vantage points in order to stare down on the green waiting for the fairies to appear instead. They never did, however, and eventually the park was cleared – although not until after 10pm.

HORDES OF KIDS BEGAN HIGHTAILING IT DOWN TO THE PARK TO CATCH A REAL LEPRECHAUN

The *Liverpool Daily Post* for that same day provided more details about the affair. According to this report, the strange beings were first sighted the night before the invasion of the park by swarms of leprechaun-hunters, on the evening of Tuesday 30 June. The *Post*'s reporter, Don McKinley, described how he had spoken to

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A typical street scene in 1960s Liverpool. Were these children among the leprechaun hunters?

COURTESY OF LIVERPOOL RECORDS OFFICE

ABOVE: A view from Jubilee Drive across part of the park in the 1960s. **OPPOSITE:** The *Liverpool Echo* breaks the story. **BELOW:** The panic spreads to nearby Kirkby.

an unnamed nine-year-old boy at the scene who claimed to have started the whole thing off. According to this lad's now quaint-sounding tones, "Last night I saw little men in white hats throwing stones and mud at each other on the bowling green. Honest mister, I did."

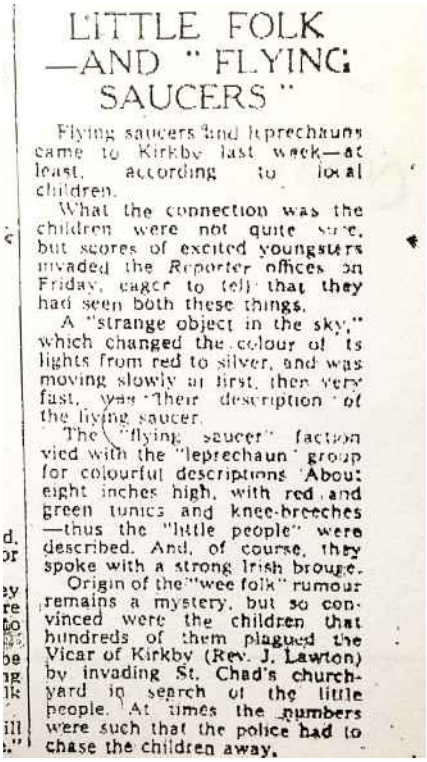
The next evening, it seems, the children, perhaps made angry by the leprechauns' persistent no-show, turned to acts of violence to get their kicks instead. Stones began to be hurled left, right and centre, particularly at poor old James Nolan, the parks constable, who ended up having to wear a crash helmet to protect his head from missiles. The police in the park even had to set up a temporary first-aid shelter in order to treat kids who had been injured during the chaos.

THE COMING OF THE SAUCERS

The initial source of these childish rumours must remain forever a matter of speculation, but the reporting of such sensational and fun-sounding events in the local press was probably responsible for the subsequent spread of the scare. The *Liverpool Echo* for 13 July, for instance, reported that the panic had widened to the town of Kirkby, just north-east of the city where, between 10 and 12 July, masses of children began invading the churchyard of St Chad's Church looking for leprechauns, until, their numbers becoming so great, the police once more had to come along and usher them away.

Interestingly, the form of these later events appears to have been heavily influenced by the earlier press reports, particularly that of 2 July in the *Echo*. We

CHILDREN INVADED THE CHURCHYARD LOOKING FOR LEPRECHAUNS



LITTLE FOLK —AND "FLYING SAUCERS"

Flying saucers and leprechauns came to Kirkby last week—at least, according to local children.

What the connection was the children were not quite sure, but scores of excited youngsters invaded the *Reporter* offices on Friday, eager to tell that they had seen both these things.

A "strange object in the sky," which changed the colour of its lights from red to silver, and was moving slowly at first, then very fast, was their description of the flying saucer.

The "flying saucer" faction vied with the "leprechaun" group for colourful descriptions. About eight inches high, with red and green tunics and knee-breeches—thus the "little people" were described. And, of course, they spoke with a strong Irish brogue.

Origin of the "wee folk" rumour remains a mystery, but so convinced were the children that hundreds of them plagued the Vicar of Kirkby (Rev. J. Lawton) by invading St. Chad's churchyard in search of the little people. At times the numbers were such that the police had to chase the children away.

can surmise this because that particular report ended with the following paragraph: "And how did those little brownies who help the Irish housewife with her chores come to arrive in Liverpool? Maybe they flew from old Ireland. A woman resident in Crosby last night reported seeing 'strange objects glistening in the sky, whizzing over the river to the city from the Irish Sea.'" To an adult, this might have been comprehensible as being the reporter's little joke; sarcastic references to 'old Ireland' seem to be being used to identify the story as not one meant to be taken entirely seriously. It is, he apparently suggests, essentially 'blarney'. However, to a child this might not all have been quite so obvious...

After the Kirkby scare had burnt itself out, the *Kirkby Reporter* ran a story on 17 July headlined "Little Folk – and Flying Saucers", in which it was revealed that the rumours had taken on a new tone. Prior to the *Echo*'s report, there had been no suggestion that UFOs had anything whatsoever to do with all this madness; but now, they had become an integral component of the affair. According to the *Reporter*, "scores of excited youngsters" had "invaded" their offices on Friday 10 July, babbling about having seen a "strange object in the sky" which "changed the colour of its lights from red to silver, and was moving slowly at first, then very fast". Others, equally eager to be heard, told of having seen leprechauns, which had presumably come out of the spaceships; they were, they said, about 8in (20cm) tall, wore red and green tunics and knee-breeches, and talked with a strong Irish accent.

Leprechauns Go Bowling In The Park

Thousands of children joined in a big hunt in Liverpool last night for — leprechauns. They invaded Jubilee Park in Jubilee Drive, hunted among the shrubberies, tore up some small plants and turf, scaled surrounding walls, and searched empty houses.

The Great Leprechaun Hunt all started after some one had reported seeing "little green men in white hats throwing stones and tiny clods of earth at one another" on the bowling green the previous night.

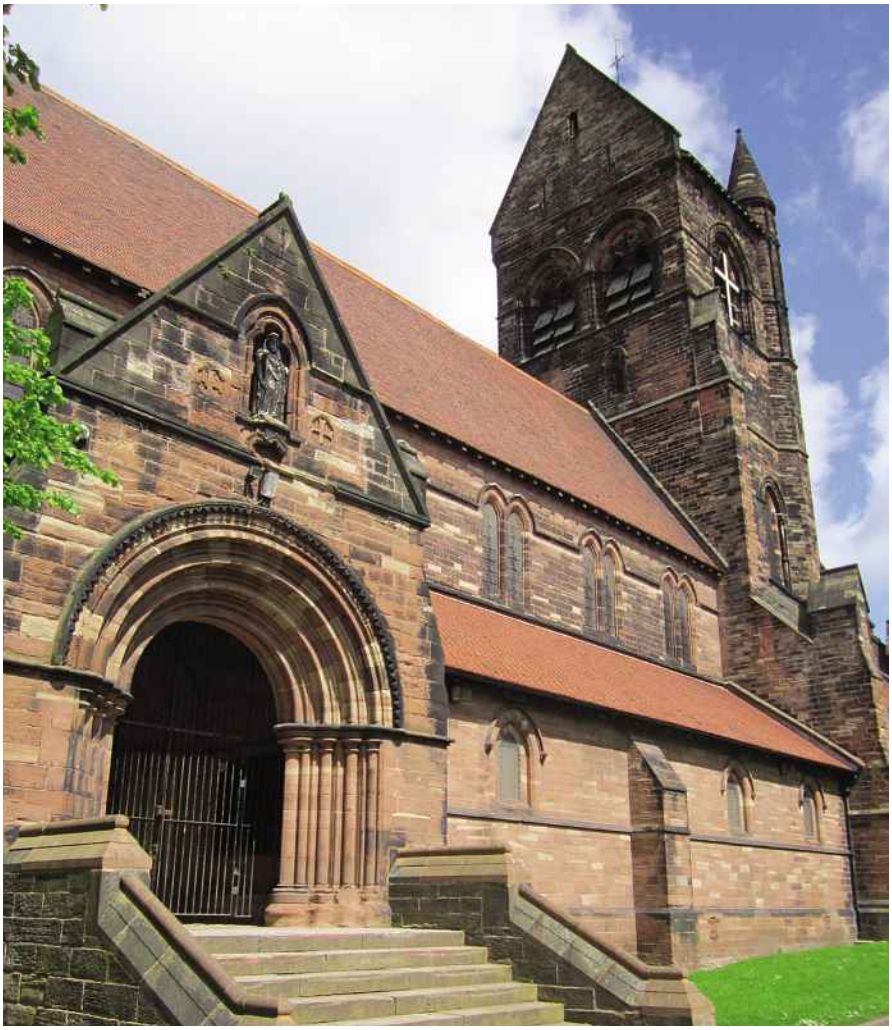
That story buzzed through all the schools in the area. And when the schools closed yesterday afternoon the youngsters swarmed to the park.

It was all too much for Irish parks constable James Nolan ("I don't believe in leprechauns meself"). He called in the city police. Police in cars and on motorcycles arrived. They cleared the hundreds of youngsters from the bowling greens — that was the reported playground of the wee folk — closed the gate and stood guard.

But beyon the bowling green gates the youngsters milled, tiny tots to 14-year-olds. They crammed the top of the covered reservoir for a better view of the bowling green. Tolerant bobbies wandered about trying to get the youngsters on the move. But the kids would not believe that there were no little green men. It was not until after 10 o'clock that the park was cleared.

How the story started was not known. But last night was the second night running of the leprechaun hunt.

And how did those little brownies who help the Irish housewife with her chores come to arrive in Liverpool? Maybe they flew in from ould Ireland. A woman resident in Crosby last night reported seeing "strange objects glistening in the sky whizzing over the river to the city from the Irish Sea."



TOP: St Chad's Church, Kirkby, where children massed to search for the Little People. **ABOVE:** A view across Leam Lane to the farm, where fairy-like spacemen were reported running around a haystack and riding cows.

GEORDIE GNOMES

Around 12 July, however, it seemed that the panic had come to an end. And that was that – the leprechauns had gone forever. But where did they come from in the first place? There are several possible leads. Firstly, Merseyside was not the only region where leprechauns were sighted during 1964. Another panic had broken out near Newcastle about a month beforehand, as detailed in the *Newcastle Journal* for 9 June. Here were reported strange goings-on upon Leam Lane Farm in Felling, eastern Gateshead, where, on 2 June, a 14-year-old boy named David Wilson claimed to have seen about half a dozen dwarf-like creatures, two feet high, dressed in green and with hands like lit electric bulbs, running around a haystack and digging down into it as if looking for the proverbial needle.

Before long, rumours about fairy-like spacemen flying around in egg-shaped craft were rife amongst the area's schoolchildren; one girl claimed to have sighted a silvery disc-shaped object, about the size of a car, taking off with a spinning motion and giving

off an orange glow. Another said that she had seen the dwarfs' leader; he was dressed in black and carried a baton with pink stripes on it. Yet another little girl claimed to have witnessed a small man sitting on top of a barn. Another group of kids said that they had seen a tiny alien riding around the place on the back of a cow.

Things got so bad that the headmaster of the local Roman Road Junior School, a Mr M Coates, felt compelled to make a denial to the papers that he himself had added fuel to the flames by calling a special assembly at which he had warned his pupils ominously to "stay away from the farm". These were, he said, just "silly rumours".

Could it be possible that this article was the ultimate source of the Liverpool rumours too? It is obviously feasible that news of these events could have reached the city; it is easy enough to imagine a few people from Merseyside being in the North-East in June and picking up on it all, or some copies of the *Journal* – which did specifically use the word 'leprechauns' in its report – being brought into Liverpool by travellers. This suggestion is pure speculation, admittedly, though the influence of the press upon the shape the panic took can quite clearly be seen in the later Kirkby manifestations, so the notion doesn't seem entirely implausible.

SPRING-HEELED BRIAN

However, another alleged explanation for the whole affair appeared nearly 20 years later, in the 26 January 1982 edition of the *Liverpool Echo*. Here, a man called Brian Jones claimed to actually have *been* one of the leprechauns! According to Brian, he had been tidying his grandfather's garden on Edge Lane, which backed onto Jubilee Park, whilst wearing some old clothes: namely, wellies, a denim shirt, navy-blue trousers and a woolly hat with a bobble on top of it. Puffing on his pipe during a break from weeding, he said that he noticed some children sitting on top of the 10-ft (3m)-tall wall which separated his grandfather's property from the park. Seeing the way he was dressed, and noticing that he was somewhat on the small side, one of them shouted out, possibly facetiously, "It's a leprechaun!"

Theorising that, due to the extreme height of his grandfather's weeds, a trick of perspective must have made him look like something of a midget to the kids, he decided to play a trick and scare them away by actually pretending to be a leprechaun. Accordingly, he began jumping up and down, babbling made-up words, and throwing sods of turf at the children on the wall. Scared, they ran away pretty sharpish.

The next evening, however, Brian was once again in his grandfather's garden when he heard the noise of a crowd gathered on the other side of the wall. Peering over it, he saw about 300 excited children standing on top of the covered reservoir in the park, leprechaun-hunting. Seeing him, they began to shout "There's the leprechaun!" – or words to that effect – so Brian very kindly decided to put on another show for them and began jumping around, waving his fists in mock-anger and throwing pieces of turf up into the air for, he says, over an hour. Then, he went back inside his grandfather's house, changed back into his normal clothes, and wandered around the park incognito, trying to overhear what the children were saying to each other about his antics. He says that he heard them all trying to outdo one another by claiming to have witnessed not one, but ever-larger numbers of the Little Folk.

The next day, though, Brian found that his plan had backfired. Swarms of children kept on coming round to his grandad's house and demanding to see the leprechauns, and several invaded the garden, looking for the fairies' lair. Eventually, Brian began to fear for his life when he overheard two boys saying that they were going to shoot the leprechauns dead with air rifles and then put them into jam-jars to show their teachers. Brian said that he therefore decided to put the children off the scent by dressing up as a leprechaun again and going and putting on his act in the garden of a nearby empty house, so that the kids would start going on the rampage there instead. This he did for three nights in a row, so successfully that – he claimed – the building itself actually later had to be demolished due to the children damaging it so much during their leprechaun-hunt.

HE WAS WEARING WELLIES, NAVY-BLUE TROUSERS AND A WOOLLY BOBBLE HAT

True EXCLUSIVE confessions of the Liverpool leprechaun

TODAY the Echo can reveal all, the story that shook Liverpool, and that started a myth within the city—the great Liverpool Leprechaun Hunt.

It was on June 30, 1964, that three children ran panic stricken to their chums and gasped out that they'd seen a leprechaun in a garden—the little fellow just visible in the tall grass, hurling clods of earth into the air, and babbling away.

It caused such a sensation that the police had to seal off parks and vicars close their churchyards as thousands of children scoured every blade of grass for the little people.

Experts called it mass hysteria, but the children persisted with their claims until adult scepticism finally overwhelmed them.

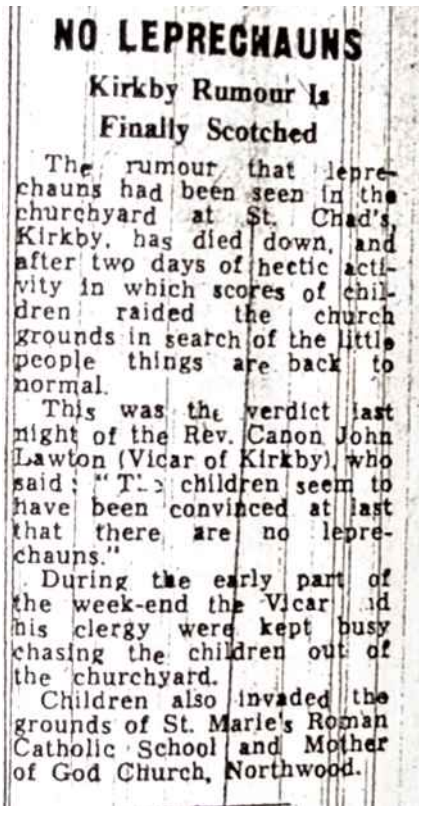
But the children were right. The "leprechaun"

BRIAN JONES solves the mystery that's haunted Merseyside for almost twenty years

IF MY grandfather's garden had not been a wilderness all this would not have happened.

Grandfather's house in Edge Lane had a huge garden, backing on to Kensington Gardens, with a ten-

To be sure, these Little People cause a big stir



NO LEPRECHAUNS

Kirkby Rumour Is Finally Scotched

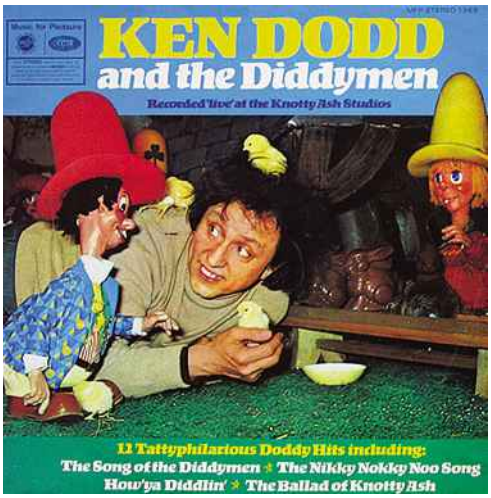
The rumour that leprechauns had been seen in the churchyard at St. Chad's, Kirkby, has died down, and after two days of hectic activity in which scores of children raided the church grounds in search of the little people things are back to normal.

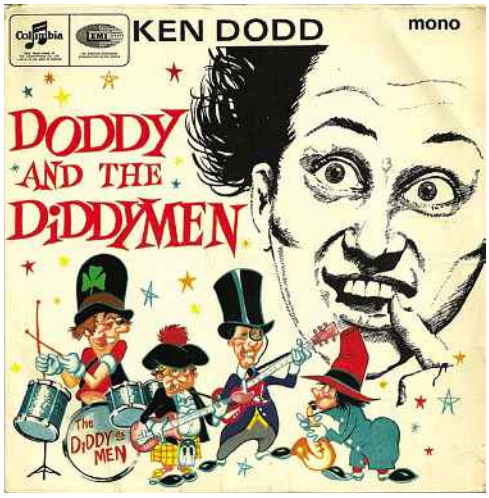
This was the verdict last night of the Rev. Canon John Lawton (Vicar of Kirkby), who said: "The children seem to have been convinced at last that there are no leprechauns."

During the early part of the week-end the Vicar and his clergy were kept busy chasing the children out of the churchyard.

Children also invaded the grounds of St. Marie's Roman Catholic School and Mother of God Church, Northwood.

ABOVE LEFT: In 1982, nearly two decades after the Jubilee Park leprechaun panic, local man Brian Jones told the *Liverpool Echo* the unlikely tale of how he had started the entire chain of events whilst tidying his grandfather's garden on the edge of the park and being mistaken for one of the little people. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Kirkby panic dies down.


KEN DODD
and the Diddymen
Recorded 'live' at the Knotty Ash Studios
11 Tattyphilarious Doddy Hits including:
The Song of the Diddymen + The Nikky Nokky Noo Song
How'ya Diddlin' + The Ballad of Knotty Ash



That, at least, is Brian Jones's story – and it doesn't really add up. For one thing, the clothing he was wearing clearly does not tally with the original reports of little men wearing white hats, and neither was Brian's skin remotely green. In addition, his recollection of dates doesn't seem to correspond with the contemporary reports from 1964.

Furthermore, can we *really* believe that anybody, even a group of small children, could have so shaky a grasp of the laws of perspective that they would mistake a small man standing next to some tall weeds for a leprechaun? And why, if they did believe, did they not try to catch him? Moreover, why are there no press reports about the house down the road being destroyed by rapacious leprechaun hunters? Finally, there is the small fact that the wall between Jones's grandfather's house and Jubilee Park was, as he said, about 10 feet tall – so how high, exactly, must the man have been jumping to have been seen by the kids on the other side of it?

HIT ME WITH YOUR TICKLE-STICK

Another strange little man from Liverpool once claimed to have been responsible for the outbreak too, however – namely, the Merseyside comedian Ken Dodd, of tickle-stick and Knotty Ash fame. He, of course, was well-known for his use of the 'Diddy Men' in his act, a group of strangely-dressed performing dwarfs who used to join him on-stage.

In January 1965, an item appeared in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, in which Dodd professed to be the man who had started the whole thing off. According to him, "Just before all these rumours started, I did an item on television. We used a special technique by which the cameras were able to 'diddify' people. It was rather like looking through the wrong end of a telescope. We arranged everything so that television commentator Bill Grundy [a former regional TV presenter] was reduced to about four inches on the screen and I described him as a Diddy Man from Ireland – a leprechaun. Immediately afterwards, there were all sorts of stories about leprechauns being sighted by people all over the place. Children were running around parks and gardens looking for the little men." This is an interesting idea, but it is rather dependent upon thousands of Liverpool's children being entirely unaware of the difference between a television comedy programme and actual reality.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE AND TOP: Could an outbreak of Diddymania have been responisble for the leprechaun panic? Merseyside comedian Kenn Dodd claimed that he had started the scare by 'diddifying' TV presenter Bill Grundy.

A further attempted explanation for the events relates to Liverpool's undoubted Irish heritage. Liverpool has one of the largest populations of Irish origin in mainland Britain, a result largely of Irish immigration during the Great Famine of 1845-52. Given this, it has been suggested in some quarters that the Irish-tinged cultural background of the city had made the children naturally receptive to believing in tales about such a stereotypically Irish entity as the leprechaun.

Certainly, the local press at the time did indeed seem to have played up this 'Irish element' in it all. Remember the original *Echo* reporter's facetious words about "those little brownies who help the Irish housewife with her chores" flying in from "old Ireland" in their flying saucers, for instance? There seems to have been a deliberate attempt by the particular journalist in question to identify the story as being inherently unreliable – or somehow quintessentially 'Irish' in its nature. Traditionally, the Irish are meant to be great spinners of yarns, or, in the realm of popular jokes, much-told still on Merseyside, not exactly the brightest bulbs in the box. Indeed, as if to emphasise this not-so-subtle prejudice, the reporter actually

I'M THE LEPRECHAUN....

The 1964 Liverpool leprechaun panic may sound incredible, but it is not unique. A small minority of people really do believe in leprechauns, even in the present day, and actually profess to have seen them. In Ireland, for instance, a project dubbed 'Leprechaun Watch' (their version of Badger Watch, presumably) has been set up in recent years by placing a camera inside an old oak tree standing within a fairy-ring on an unnamed landowner's property in County Tipperary which, he claims, has been cursed by the fairies, in order to catch any possible leprechaun activity in the area on film for all posterity. [1]

An account in Dermot MacManus's famous compendium of modern fairy-sightings *The Middle Kingdom*, meanwhile, of an Irish doctor's childhood leprechaun encounter, is also worth citing. He said that, after bathing with a friend in a pool not far from the River Moy in County Mayo, he saw something dart behind a boulder on his left. Looking behind it, the boys said that they saw "a little man about 4ft [1.2m] high", wearing a cap and silky black coat, with a broad flat face, and clean-shaven except for some curly brown whiskers which ran around his chin from ear to ear. The leprechaun grinned at them in a friendly fashion, the doctor told MacManus in adulthood, but still they ran in terror. [2] (It's worth noting in light of this alleged sighting, incidentally, that the leprechauns of Liverpool don't really

fit in with the descriptions of the little man we have available to us from 'old Ireland'; he didn't have green skin, and he certainly didn't wear a white hat. Generally, he was meant to be a 'fairy-shoemaker', and wore red as opposed to green. The image you'll most likely have in your head of a leprechaun at present – ginger, emerald-clad and with a four-leafed clover sticking out of his hat – is essentially a creation of the 20th-century media and the modern Irish tourist industry rather than of actual folk-tradition.)

There are even some alleged leprechaun sightings from modern-day America, where, starting in March 2006, a panic similar in scale to the events in Liverpool broke out in the small Alabama town of Crichton, near Mobile, where people reported seeing a leprechaun on the loose and hiding in a tree. According to several witnesses, a small man wearing a hat could be seen peering down from this tree after dark, which led to large numbers of local residents gathering around it at night and shining torches up into the leaves in an attempt to get the fairy to reveal the whereabouts of its legendary pot of gold. Some carried Irish flutes with them, presumably in an attempt to entice it down with music. A (very) crude amateur sketch of the creature was released by one witness to the press, sparking predictable ridicule.

Unlike 1960s Liverpudlians, however, 21st-century Americans soon saw money-making opportunities in the story, and began selling T-shirts with pictures of the sketch to hundreds of tourists and gawkers who were making their way to the town, causing traffic-jams and chaos. A rap song – called Where Da Gold At? – was even released to cash in on it all, containing terrible-sounding lyrics such as "Who all seen da leprechaun say yeah!" [3] Somehow, the Beatles managed to resist similarly exploiting their own local fairy-scare when they had the chance back in 1964.

NOTES

1 bit.ly/csRTyY

2 Dermot MacManus, *The Middle Kingdom: The Faerie World of Ireland*, Colin Smythe, 1979, pp38-39

3 bit.ly/w1S2T3

specifically identifies James Nolan in his report not simply as being a parks constable, but as being an "*Irish* parks constable".

This is despite the fact that, apparently, the man was not Irish at all – at least not according to his fellow former parks constable John Hutchinson in a comment about the story he posted online. The *Echo* reporter 'accidentally' making up a detail such as this seems to show quite clearly that the tinge of Irishness given to the whole affair was considered likely to discredit it all as simply being a bit of good, old-fashioned *craic*.

However, Hutchinson then also suggests that it was a *craic* of another kind; according to him, Nolan deliberately made up the whole rumour in the first place, viewing the subsequent appearance of thousands of children in the park as being a good opportunity for him and his pals to get some easy overtime by supervising them running around until late at night. Supposedly, the Head Constable of the Parks Police at the time, a man named John Buchanan, got wise about this and told Nolan to stop it all and keep his mouth shut about the whole affair.

THE HUNT IS ON

There is another explanation available for all of this, though, and that is that the leprechauns were actually real. Admittedly, this is incredibly unlikely, but there are a few purported named witnesses who claim to have seen the Little People with their own eyes. According to a post online from a woman called Linda Tahmasebi, for instance, she and her friends attended Brae Street School (now Kensington Primary) in the area, and they all looked out of the window one day in 1964 and saw about four of these creatures, "all of them tiny" and "dressed like a school book idea of a typical gnome", sitting on the window ledge and swinging their legs about, which is very interesting, if true.

Ultimately, however, the evidence for the literal reality of Liverpool's leprechauns is predictably negligible. Most of the other explanations for the whole affair we have examined don't add up either, however. So what was behind it all? One plausible answer to the conundrum is likely to lie in the case's extreme resemblance to a variety of localised childhood panic known to folklorists as 'children's hunts'. These are essentially spontaneous disorganised rampages by children through their local area in search of some ostensible – but ultimately uncatchable – paranormal entities, perhaps the classic such example being a 1954 scare in Glasgow in which hundreds of children laid siege to the city's Southern Necropolis graveyard armed with knives and sharpened sticks hunting for a seven-foot tall vampire with iron teeth. What precisely the entities hunted are varies with time and fashion, but in Liverpool in 1964 it was apparently the turn of the leprechauns to be sought as quarry.

Ultimately, then, I think that there is one reason above all why the children of Liverpool rioted over leprechauns in the summer of '64; basically, it was incredibly good fun! FT

FT would like to thank Roger Hull of the Liverpool Record Office and Bob Edwards of Liverpool Picturebook for their help in preparing this article

SOURCES

Other than contemporary newspaper reports detailed in the text, an article about the affair by Nigel Watson on the *Magonia* website is a useful source (http://magonia.haaan.com/2009/leprechauns/) and *Flying Saucer Review*, vol.10, no.5, contains details about the previous Newcastle scare.

This is an edited extract from the book *Haunted Merseyside* (ISBN 9781848687295) by SD Tucker, on sale now from Amberley Publishing, RRP £15.99.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

SD TUCKER is a writer living in the Merseyside area, and a regular *FT* contributor. His latest book is *Paranormal Merseyside*, and his next, *Terror of the Tokoloshe*, is due out later this year. He does not believe in leprechauns.

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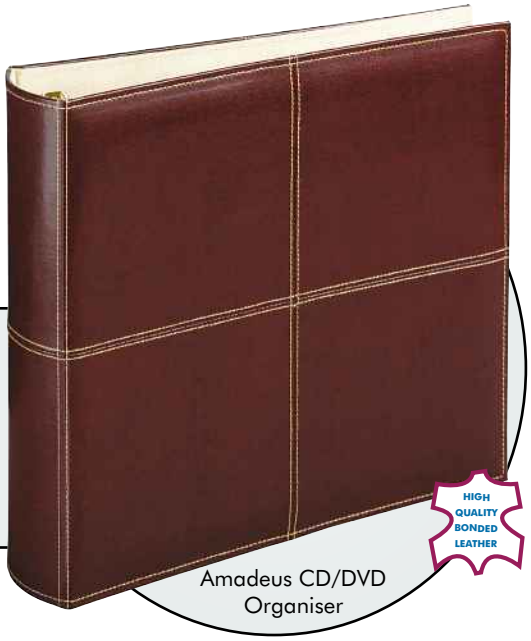

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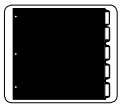
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BEATLES

THE COMEBACK SPECIAL

It's 36 years since his death, but the King is still seen in shopping malls and supermarkets all over the US and even popped up at President Obama's inauguration. Now, the saga has taken a new twist, with the emergence of DNA evidence and a woman claiming to be Presley's half-sister. TED HARRISON reports.

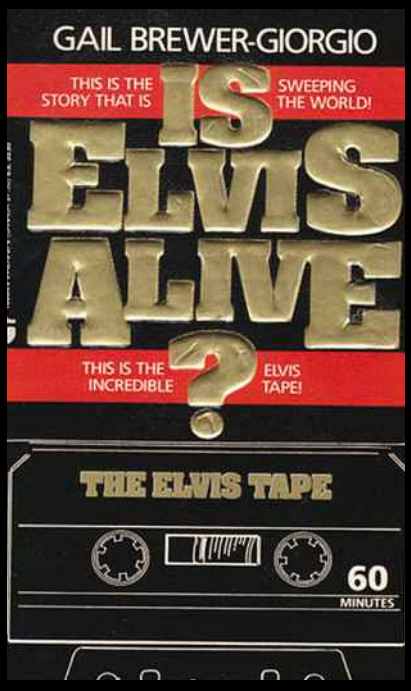
The rumours started early. In August 1977, as grieving fans arrived at Graceland to pay tribute to Elvis Presley, they heard the whispers: "The King is not dead".

The journalists who had flown to Memphis to cover the story picked up on some very strange tales. "Already the myths are being manufactured," the BBC's Michael Cole reported to camera. "I've met fans who say they're convinced he's still alive."

Thirty-six years later, the rumour mill continues to churn. There is a core group of fans who steadfastly maintain that Elvis faked his own death and went into hiding.

Technology has moved on apace since 1977 and recently, it has been claimed, DNA samples will prove, once and for all, that Elvis lives.

The DNA supposedly comes from a man called Jesse – the dead twin whose identity Elvis is said to have taken on after his 'death'. It is said to match samples taken from several of Elvis's known relations – and from a woman, known as Eliza Presley, who is trying to prove that she is Elvis's half-sister. Attempts to have the samples legally verified by an American court have failed twice on legal technicalities; but one lawyer has taken a close interest in the case and has gone on record saying the evidence "is strong and compelling".



In 2008, Dr Donald Yates of the Arizona-based laboratory DNA Consultants was so convinced by the samples he was given to test that he told a Memphis probate judge that the DNA taken from the person named Jesse was that of Elvis Presley. "It is from a live person because the DNA is recent," he said. "There are a lot of Elvis impersonators, but I don't think you can imitate DNA. It's hard to get your mind around this story." [1]

A set of tests conducted by the Paleo-DNA Laboratory at Lakehead University in Ontario, Canada, also came to the same conclusion. However, shortly after announcing the results, the laboratory issued a correction: "We did some initial

OPPOSITE PAGE: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Post-mortem photos of the King behind a Graceland screen door and with Jesse Jackson and Mohannad Ali; both images have subsequently been explained.
BELOW: Eliza Presley, whose claim of being Elvis's half-sister has taken the saga into whole new areas, including that of DNA evidence.

tests for Eliza and our calculations did show a relationship, but when an error was discovered in our calculations, another report with corrected values was generated and the results did not show a relationship." Forensic analyst Stephen Fratpietro explained: "The correction report was issued about two weeks after the last set of incorrect results was issued. The error was discovered in a routine review of protocols specifically a database of American DNA frequencies."

The DNA evidence has been at the centre of a case being brought by Eliza Presley to prove that her father was Vernon Presley, Elvis's father, and that she therefore is Elvis's half-sister. She is the first person to have made any legal headway with a claim relating to Elvis and his family estates. So far her case has foundered on rulings concerning jurisdiction, and not on the evidence. Although two years ago she announced that shortage of funds would prevent her from pursuing the claim further, in 2012 Memphis attorney Kathleen Caldwell announced that a third attempt would be made: "Ms Presley intends to re-file in Probate Court in Tennessee... She believes strongly that she should be recognised as Vernon Elvis Presley's child, and that she should be allowed to claim her share of the four separate trusts he left as his 'unknown heirs' due to her adoption at birth."

In addition to the DNA evidence, a forensic graphologist hired by the Missouri Attorney General backs the Jesse story. She went on record saying that his writing matched known examples of Elvis's hand. Jesse is the same man who, 12 years ago, was reportedly treated by a Kansas City psychiatrist, Dr Donald Hinton. He too was sure his patient was the legendary King of Rock 'n' Roll living under an assumed name and co-authored a book with him. [2]

STILL IN THE BUILDING?

One common version of the 'Elvis is still alive' story claims that Elvis faked his own death in order rediscover a life of peace and anonymity. Another variation on the theme suggests that Elvis was forced into hiding for his own safety, having been targeted by drug-barons and mobsters. A third suggestion is that Elvis's manager, the notorious Colonel Parker, hatched the plot. Ever one for the quick buck, he calculated, correctly, that Elvis was worth more dead than alive. Whatever the reason, it was the Colonel, supposedly, who arranged for a wax effigy to be placed in Elvis's open casket, for a substitute body to be buried in the grave and for all the legal paperwork to be fraudulently completed – or so the 'Elvis lives' lobby believes.

SHE IS THE FIRST PERSON TO HAVE MADE ANY HEADWAY WITH A CLAIM RELATING TO ELVIS

Yet the Colonel's plans must have been executed with a degree of carelessness, for Elvis has been spotted alive on many occasions over the years. One fan, it is said, even photographed him at Graceland looking out from behind a screen door. There have been numerous other sightings with Elvis being spotted around North America at gas stations, supermarkets and shopping malls. He was even spotted in the crowd at President Obama's 2009 inauguration. Pictures of the mystery man seen watching the new president were later superimposed on images of Elvis and facial characteristics were said to be a close match. [3]

Kalamazoo in Michigan became a centre of Elvis appearances in the 1980s. In August 1988, a Detroit News reporter went to the town looking for him and, she says, had a bizarre encounter with a man she believes was Elvis. He was in an office block, protected by a team of security guards. He never admitted to being Presley, and she didn't ask outright, but Kelly Burgess is in no doubt she had a close encounter.

By extraordinary, or spooky, coincidence, shortly after Elvis's reported death, two American writers, unknown to each other, started work on books with very similar themes. However, when the books were published, both Monte Nicholson and Gail Brewer-Giorgio reported that their publishers lost interest and all copies at bookshops were mysteriously bought in bulk and never replaced. Brewer-Giorgio's 1978 novel *Orion* told the story of a fictional singer called Orion who faked his death. Such was the reaction to her book that she began to wonder if something similar might have happened to Elvis. She started her own investigation and, in a second book, published a list of alleged oddities and inconsistencies linked to Presley's reported demise. [4]

She elaborated on her theory in a third book, hyping what she had uncovered as "the shocking evidence". [5] Why, she asked, was Elvis's life insurance policy never cashed? Why did his father Vernon refuse to drape his son's coffin with the American flag? Several of her key points of evidence have been refuted. The photograph of Elvis watching fans from behind a screen door at Graceland, supposedly after death, has been explained away as a picture of a Graceland employee. The photographer told television interviewer Larry King that he never claimed it was Elvis, only that he initially thought the face looked like him.

In the case of another alleged post-1977 photograph of Elvis, the one showing him with

Mohammad Ali and Jesse Jackson in 1984, a member of Ali's entourage, Larry Kolb, has come forward to say that the picture is him, not Elvis. Larry certainly has a superficial look of Elvis to his face.

Supporters of Gail Brewer-Giorgio suggest that the Graceland estate has worked behind the scenes to discredit the evidence and they hint at dirty tricks. They point to the mysterious death of Jimmy Ellis. He was a modestly successful entertainer and Elvis impersonator who, for a while, performed as 'Orion' and appeared at his gigs as a masked Elvis. Rumours spread that recordings released in his name were so Elvis-like that they must have been recorded by the King himself. Some fans were convinced that Jimmy Ellis was a front for Elvis, and believed the King himself would sometimes take Jimmy's place and hide behind the mask to perform live at Orion concerts.

After one of Jimmy's concerts, in which he appeared with Elvis's backing group the Jordanaires, it was suggested by one local newspaper reporter that Orion had the same vocal cords as Elvis Presley which was, "both a kiss and a curse." [6]

Jimmy Ellis was undoubtedly a real performer, but did he also cooperate with Elvis to provide him with a cover for a second singing career? Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to ask Jimmy himself. Having opted out of show business to run a shop in Selma, Alabama, he was murdered in 1998.

There is no independent proof that the Orion masquerade had anything to do with a secret living Elvis. Every tall story and rumour to date has been summarily dismissed by the Elvis Estate as merely nonsense and not worth commenting on. Aware of the legal nightmare that would ensue should the king decide to reappear, Elvis Presley Enterprises and management company Core Media Group that now owns the rights to the Elvis legend do nothing to encourage the stories and sightings.

ELIZA AND JESSE

To date, the truth behind the rumours has never been tested in a court of law. The reason, say the conspiracy theorists, is that the Elvis estate does not want too many awkward questions asked. Eliza Presley believes that the Presley estate hired lawyers to thwart her attempts to prove she is Vernon's daughter, fearing the challenge to Vernon's will might force the real Elvis to emerge from hiding.

Should the DNA and other 'evidence' ever have its day in court, four key players would be involved: Eliza Presley, who believes she is Elvis's half-sister; the mystery-man called Jesse – a former patient of Kansas City psychiatrist, Dr Donald Hinton; and an Elvis fan called Linda Hood Sigmon who says she not only knows the true identity of Jesse, but is in regular contact with him. [7]

Initially Eliza Presley had no interest in proving Elvis was still alive. She had been

LEFT: The 1997 photo of Jesse/Elvis produced by Dr Donald Hinton. **CENTRE:** The masked Jimmy Ellis as 'Orion'. **BOTTOM:** Elvis fan Linda Hood Sigmon, who claims to be in contact with Jesse today.

adopted at birth and was curious to find out who her biological father might be. Her enquiries led her to believe she had connections with the Presley family in Memphis and that she might be an illegitimate daughter of Vernon, which is when she changed her name to Presley.

Yet in building up her legal case she says she has uncovered evidence linking her to a claim made12 years ago by Dr Hinton. He said he was treating a man called Jesse, who was in reality Elvis Presley. He provided a photograph of Jesse, white-haired and arthritic, holding a child. The child, it was claimed, was Jesse's grandson Benjamin and the photograph, taken in 1997, shows a child with a close resemblance to Lisa Marie Presley's son. Furthermore, the doctor said, Elvis would reveal himself to his fans in 2002. Comparisons made at the time supposedly showed that the secretive and enigmatic Jesse's DNA matched that of members of the Presley family.

Following his astonishing revelations, Dr Hinton found himself under tough public scrutiny. He was investigated by his professional body and for a while had his licence to prescribe certain medication removed. It was a difficult time, the doctor later admitted, but he never withdrew his story. He did, however, lose touch with his patient and had put the whole episode behind him when he was reluctantly drawn into Eliza Presley's case as a potential witness.

Eliza says she got hold of a DNA sample from Dr Hinton's patient, lifting it from saliva traces on an envelope. She had it tested, and discovered its markers confirmed a close blood tie with herself.

In October 2008 a Memphis judge ruled that she could proceed with a claim for a share in Vernon Presley's estate. Eliza Presley's attorney Kathleen Caldwell had assured the judge that the DNA evidence was reliable. "They've been tested and retested by various labs and proof is conclusive," she said.

Eliza Presley's birth mother, however, denied that Vernon was her daughter's father. She admitted that she had known Elvis and used to go to Graceland, but said she had only met Vernon once.

Eliza's journey through the legal process has been monitored by lawyer Andrew Mayoras, who blogs as The Probate Lawyer. [8] "Her lawsuit is indeed proceeding, although slower than they'd like it to for a number of reasons. Getting the Estate of Vernon Presley reopened was the first step. That alone was a big accomplishment, because no Presley Estate had ever been reopened, despite the number of people claiming to be related to Elvis. And it now appears that the court case will be coming to a head in the near future." This, Eliza has not confirmed.

Although not representing her, Mayoras made contact with Eliza and spoke to her. He later blogged: "I've found Eliza to be very

JSTAN HONDA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Elvis's grave at Graceland; is the spelling of his middle name with a double rather than a single letter A intended as a clue to the truth?

open and honest with me."

He read the DNA reports and says they were "nothing short of fascinating." Yet, he cautioned: "The public will need to see something more direct and concrete to prove a conspiracy this strong. Relying on blind samples provided by cousins, outside of the court process, is not enough to change the history books."

To settle the matter would require Elvis's only acknowledged daughter, Lisa Marie, to provide a DNA sample. Lisa Marie refused a request from Fox TV to provide a saliva sample. "The attorney for Elvis Presley Enterprises said in the past that Lisa Marie won't," says Mayoras, "because once she does it for one person, then she'll have to do it for everyone claiming to be related to Elvis."

Eliza has explored legal ways to her to take a single test that could be used in her case and by any subsequent claimant. Lisa Marie now lives in the UK, and if she remains this side of the Atlantic no American civil court can force her to comply.

The only other way to test Eliza's claim, says Mayoras, is to exhume Elvis's body.

Eliza Presley claims that, in addition to her DNA link with Jesse, she is also linked with members of the Presley family from whom DNA samples have been obtained. One first cousin, Gene Smith, has publicly stated that the body in the casket that he viewed did not appear to be Elvis. In court, however, Eliza's legal team would have to explain how the Paleo-DNA Laboratory's positive findings were subsequently overturned. Asked recently to explain the change of heart, Mr Fratpietro said:"Our lab doesn't do these kinds of relationship tests very often, but for this case we used a rarely-used American DNA database we had on file. The interpretation or way the numbers were presented in this database was in question as they did not follow the way numbers were presented in our other database." He could not say how often or seldom such errors occurred. Inevitably, rumours have circulated that the laboratory was pressured by the Presley estate, but there is no evidence to support this.

WHY DID HE LEAVE BEHIND SO MANY CLUES SUGGESTING THAT HE HAD NOT LEFT THE BUILDING?

A LIFE DEVOID OF PURPOSE

Jesse is no longer a patient of Dr Hinton, who still maintains the man he knew as Jesse was Elvis, though he regrets having spoken so publicly about his contact. Elvis, or Jesse, does however retain ongoing contact with a woman called Linda Hood Sigmon who claims she has known him since 1992. Linda says that he is alive somewhere in the USA and has enough money for his immediate needs, but lives a life devoid of any purpose. In contacts between them he admits to being bored and having problems with depression.

Linda has received handwritten letters from Jesse and the writing in those letters – and in other specimens obtained from Dr Hinton – has been examined by graphologists and compared with letters known to have been written by Elvis in his lifetime. While a professional forensic graphologist, Mary Kelly, engaged by Fox TV to examine Jesse's handwriting, could not confirm an indisputable link, a second professional graphologist, Shirley Mae Mason, did go on record saying the writing she studied matched. Her sample came from a letter supposedly written by Jesse in support of Dr Hinton, addressed to the Missouri Attorney General, which read: "Sir, I don't know if you believe in my continued existence or not, but if I continue to expose myself like I did in the book, I will be eliminated very easily. Pure and simple as that."

Handwriting analysis, while used as additional evidence, cannot of itself prove a case. DNA tests, however, can be viewed as incontrovertible evidence, assuming procedures used to take and store the samples are themselves tamper-proof. If DNA samples are to be used to prove Eliza's paternity, Jesse would have to make himself available to the court; as would Lisa Marie.

Will this ever happen? It's unlikely, as too many financial interests are at stake on both sides of the argument. Eliza Presley does not simply want the emotional satisfaction of knowing who her father was; she believes she would, as Vernon's daughter, be entitled to a share in his estate. Lisa Marie and the Graceland business are well aware of the legal chaos that would ensue should a court in any way doubt the 'fact' of Elvis's death.

Dr Hinton has explained Elvis's non-appearance in 2002 by citing financial interests. Simply put, a dead Elvis is worth more than a living Elvis. If a living Elvis emerged from the shadows to confess that he faked his death, might fans be so shocked and angry that sales of Elvis music and souvenirs would dry up? Yet, if he never had any intention of returning, why, ask the believers, did he leave behind so many clues suggesting that he had but temporarily left the building? The biggest clue, they say, is to be found at Graceland itself, where the grave-inscription shows his name with, it is claimed, a deliberate spelling mistake. The King's middle name Aaron is written with a double-A and not as Aron, the version Elvis himself used.

If Elvis is alive, will he return? There have been many false dawns, but should he stage a comeback as an 80-year-old, it would be a white-haired old gent who'd shuffle on stage to the sound of Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.

Perhaps it's best that Elvis, alive or dead, rests in peace and the fans wait for the launch of the performing 'hologram' which is currently being constructed.[9] FT

NOTES

1 *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 11 Oct 2008.

2 Donald Hinton, *The Truth about Elvis Aron Presley: in His Own Words*, 2001.

3 www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPgI4vc7ip8

4 Gail Brewer-Giorgio, *Is Elvis Alive?*, 1988.

5 Gail Brewer-Giorgio, *The Elvis Files: Was His Death Faked?*, 1990.

6 *The Nashville Tennessean*, 12 August 1997.

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For previous coverage of the Elvis mythos, see David Sutton, "King of Kings", **FT166:42-47**.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent, regular *FT* contributor and author of many books. His latest, *Apocalypse When?,* is out now from Darton, Longman and Todd.

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No 49: ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS

Here we examine the contention that the Earth was visited æons ago by spacefarers of exceptional accomplishment, who built mighty stone monuments – whose remains still impress us today – and so astonished whatever passed for humanity in those days that people regarded these visitors as gods. That's one very basic version of the 'ancient astronaut' hypothesis (AAH): in other variants, male spacefarers fancied the primitive human females, interbred with them, and begat *Homo sapiens*; today's representatives of that species still cannot figure out how the astronauts constructed their remarkable buildings (miscellaneous pyramids, cyclopean walls, megalithic monuments, &c.); and various sacred writings are deemed to be legends based on sundry ancestors' relations with the astronauts. There seems to be a general consensus that the spacemen arrived, stayed a while, and left. Or perhaps they didn't leave, but their pure form died out through interbreeding. A somewhat eccentric variant, mostly emanating from the pen of the all too repeatable Mme Helena Blavatsky – who could beat any modern psychotherapist at making stuff up as she went along – has the visitors impart their know-how to the inhabitants of the mythic 'lost continents' of Atlantis and Lemuria, or perhaps even being the original natives (by way of Venus) of those fabled lands.

Those who uncharitably consider such heady stuff to be deluded if more-or-less harmless fiction have scholarship on their side. In *Origins of the Space Gods* (2011) Jason Colavito, for instance, traces the roots of Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods?* (1969) back through Pauwels & Bergier's *Morning of the Magicians* (1960) to the admitted fiction of HP Lovecraft (and beyond, not excluding the musings of Charles Fort himself). Elsewhere Colavito quotes this passage from Lovecraft's story "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926):

> *There had been æons when other Things ruled on the earth, and They had had great cities. Remains of Them . . . were still to be found as Cyclopean stones on islands in the Pacific. They all died vast epochs of time before men came, but there were arts which could revive Them when the stars had come round again to the right positions in the cycle of eternity. They had, indeed, come themselves from the stars, and brought Their images with Them.*

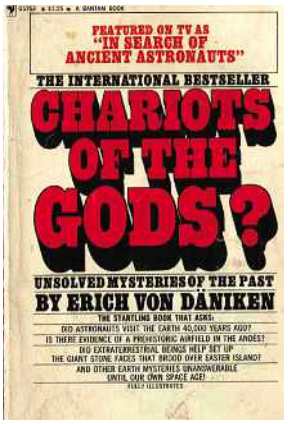
– and justly remarks: "In just these few short sentences we see the root of the entire ancient astronaut hypothesis."[1]

The classic, comprehensive demolition job on von Däniken's historical, cultural and geographical inaccuracies was wittily performed by Ronald Story in *The Space Gods Revealed* (1976), in which one can enjoy the assiduous deconstructions of virtually every one of Von Däniken's claims.[2]

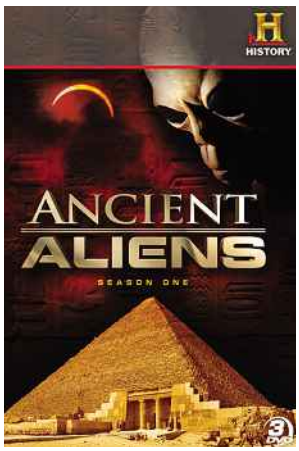
IMPERVIOUS TO ASSAULT

The debunkers had little effect. Von Däniken was followed over the years by such writers as (among others) Joseph F Blumrich, whose thesis is plain from his 1974 title *The Spaceships of Ezekiel*; Robert Temple (*The Sirius Mystery*, 1976) who maintained that the Dogon tribe of Mali had acquired esoteric astronomical knowledge from extraterrestrials; Zecharia Sitchin, whose 1978 *The 12th Planet*

presented garbled translations of Sumerian texts to support his wheeze that ancient Mesopotamian gods were actually 'Annunaki' from the planet Nibiru, who genetically engineered *Homo sapiens* into existence. As Dr Michael Heiser – an expert in ancient languages – said of his work, "Sitchin's entire system is wrong – you either believe the Sumerians or him." [3] And in latter years we've been treated to the cracked ramblings of such as David Icke, Alan F Alford, and Laurence Gardner. [4] It would be churlish not to mention Sassoon and Dale's inspired *Manna Machine* (1978), which argued that the Ark of the Covenant was a high-tech fast-food machine: those interested should note that the book started life as an article in the *New Scientist* issue of 1 April 1976. The AAH is sturdily maintained today by the History Channel's series *Ancient Aliens*, which features the wisdom of von Däniken and his acolyte Giorgio A Tsoukalos, David Hatcher Childress, and the ubiquitous Nick Pope.


FEATURED ON TV AS
"IN SEARCH OF
ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS"
THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER
CHARIOTS OF THE GODS?
UNSOLVED MYSTERIES OF THE PAST
BY ERICH VON DÄNIKEN
THE STARTLING BOOK THAT ASKS:
DID ASTRONAUTS VISIT THE EARTH 40,000 YEARS AGO?
IS THERE EVIDENCE OF A PREHISTORIC AIRFIELD IN THE ANDES?
DID EXTRATERRESTRIAL BEINGS HELP SET UP
THE GIANT STONE FACES THAT BROOD OVER EASTER ISLAND?
AND OTHER EARTH MYSTERIES UNANSWERABLE
UNTIL OUR OWN SPACE AGE!

That aliens account for key events in the early history of civilisation, for many ancient monuments, and possibly for the origins of humanity itself is, plainly, an idea with tenacious appeal. And this despite endless deconstructions of the patent nonsense promulgated by AAH proponents. Worse, these adherents seem happy to overlook the implicit racism and/or arrogance of their belief. Egyptians too stupid to work out how to construct their own pyramids? Polynesians too dumb to sculpt and erect the statues on Easter Island? Ancient Britons too simple-minded to build Stonehenge? What evidence is there that the average IQ of humanity, or even its talent for civil engineering, has improved over the centuries? None. But, as so often with such elaborate alternative histories, it would be an oversight to limit one's appreciation of the AAH to the cruel pleasures of debunkery.



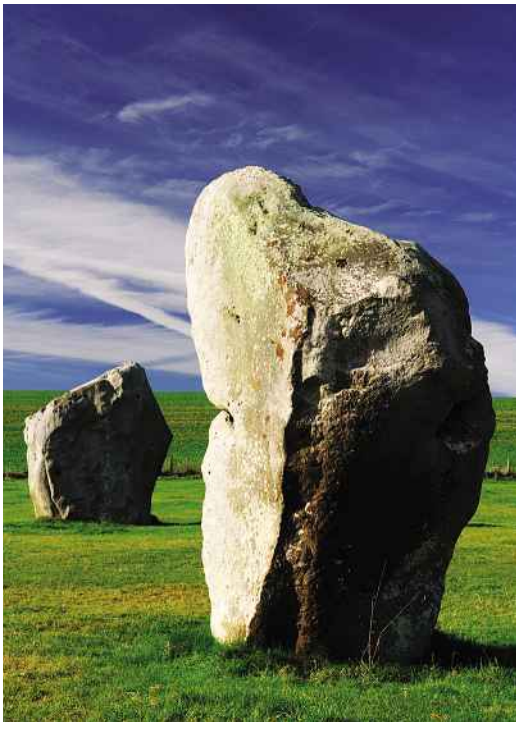
The AAH has been relegated to a cold and lonely corner of ufology, but there may be a clue to its allure elsewhere in the observation that some of this complex of ideas was co-opted to justify the failed New Age Apocalypse of 21 December 2012. Ancient-astronautism is more at home in the New Age than elsewhere: this is apparent if one cares to look at New Age notions as a whole. Analysing how and why this is so should help to illuminate the attraction of the AAH itself – and perhaps something about the New Age movement as well, which we first have to pick apart a little.

A UNIVERSE OF NOSTALGIA

One of the more surprising aspects of the New Age – to an outsider at least – is its oppositionalism. New Agers don't (despite their label) like much that is new, at all. Like Papa Thorson (Steve McQueen) in *The Hunter*, they "*like* old things". Very old things – the older the better, and if some of these things aren't actually all that old, being exotic makes up for the shortfall. New Age cosmogony has more time for the dilapidated wonders of Avebury or the Nasca plain than for the glories of Wells Cathedral or Phidias's Parthenon. For those for whom Christianity is mostly dead and wholly irrelevant and Classical culture the province of effete élitists, the *truly* ancient spaces are the most sacred. Their very antiquity entails mystery.

Material and spiritual knowledge of Stonehenge, Chaco Canyon, or Mohenjo-Daro is lost in time, no matter how subtle modern archæaeologists' speculations. This intrinsic lack of definition is crucial to their appeal, and their sanctity. All manner of projections may be cast upon a mysterious place. One such is the notion that a lost ancient wisdom is embodied in these sites. That, in itself, expresses a nostalgia for a time and culture when the world was (supposedly) at ease with itself, and man and nature lived in harmony. It is a species of golden age, but one whose 'powers' still reside in stones and groves and mounds, and which therefore remain in some sense accessible. These places – what might be called 'legend landscapes' [5] – attract dowsers and channellers in droves, along with hordes of pilgrims of various kinds. Nostalgia for a magical past is thus assuaged in the unruly present, and the ability to experience the past-in-the-present palliates contemporary *angst* and anxiety. Rationalists may retch at such stuff, but that's half the point. It is all profoundly anti-scientific and anti-rationalist, and consciously so; and as such it is of a piece with New Age contrarianism. At the same time it is an expression of the movement's underlying sentimentality, or promotion of subjectivity over objectivity.

To see how this works in the context of beliefs in ancient astronauts, it's instructive to visit the rolling downs of Wiltshire, strewn as they are with countless megaliths, henges, barrows, and, in the summer months, patterns made in the crops. The first thing to take into account is that the Wiltshire landscape has long been mysterious – since at least the time when John Aubrey 'discovered' Avebury in 1649 – and as such 'otherworldly'. A century later William Stukeley wrote that "When we contemplate the elegance of this county of Wiltshire, and the great works of antiquity therein, we may be persuaded that the two Atlantic islands, and the islands of the blessed, which Plato and other ancient writers mention, were those in reality of Britain and Ireland." Stukeley shared his thinking with his friend Isaac Newton; together they concluded that the monuments were remnants of an ancient, lost, but *recoverable* wisdom. In the 1960s, and before the rise of von Däniken, that old trickster and charlatan John Michell merged the idea of leys and 'earth energies' with the hints thrown out by fellow-Platonist Stukeley to suggest that ancient British sites, the Atlantis legend, and contemporary flying saucers were interconnected parts of a larger phenomenon. [6]



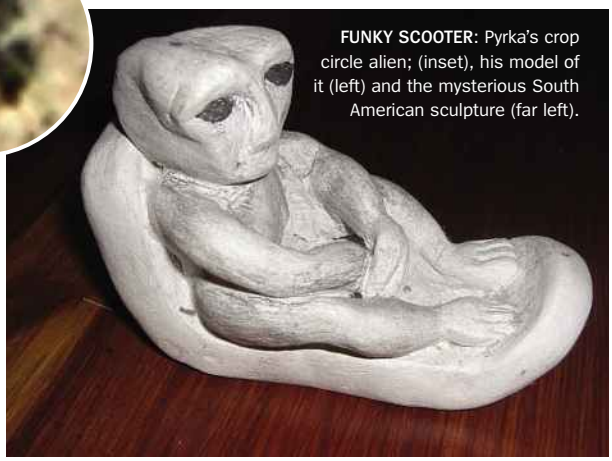
EVERY WHEATEAR THAT FALLS...

It was thus wonderfully serendipitous, and appropriate, that a few years later Doug Bower and Dave Chorley made their first crop circles in Wiltshire and not, say, the vast wheatfields of East Anglia: they created a new enigma in the midst of a whole topography of mysteries. But it was an enigma that fitted easily into that landscape.

Crop circles were initially related in

FACING PAGE & ABOVE: Erich von Däniken cemented the appeal of the ancient astronaut hypothesis.
LEFT: Avebury – at the centre of a whole topography of mysteries.

JIM GRAY / GETTY IMAGES



FUNKY SCOOTER: Pyrka's crop circle alien; (inset), his model of it (left) and the mysterious South American sculpture (far left).

the minds of New Age beholders to landed (or hovering) UFOs, which had already infested Warminster and its hinterlands in the mid to late 1960s. Wiltshire, in other words, was already established UFO country. It did not take that long to associate the marks of the saucers with the quasi-magical nature of the local landscape: for some New Agers, they were an expression of Mother Earth herself. For others, they were messages of alien entities who had been watching, perhaps nurturing, Earth for aeons past. Admittedly the messages were somewhat cryptic, and for some it's an entertainment in itself to follow their various (and not always compatible) translations as published on websites such as cropcircleconnector.com. Underlying all this was the notion that ancient, higher powers of *some* kind were behind the circles. When it became undeniable to even the meanest intelligence that the circles were man-made, it was argued that the furtive nocturnal creatures who stalked the fields with rope and plank were unconsciously driven or guided by grander entities operating largely beyond our [humourous, obscure, *and* irrelevent!] ken.

A layer below this kind of presumption is the idea that aliens are peculiarly interested in human goings-on – humanity, in other words, is cosmically significant. This is also a theme implicit in the proposition that aliens built the pyramids, laid down the lines and pictograms on the Nasca plain, *et cetera*. Selfhood – individual, communal, or global – thus lies at the centre of the universe. Naturally this is comforting to certain minds. It can reasonably be said that the whole ancient-astronaut mythos is a facet of the human tendency to narcissism, but inflated to cosmic proportions. The dark side of that outlook is a kind of paranoia (itself implicit in ufology, with its early emphasis on extraterrestrial surveillance and later obsession with 'abductions', implanted tracking devices, and so on). The psychologically literate would observe that out of that obsessively suspicious cast of mind emerges the New Age's characteristic oppositionalism. From this, we may speculate, comes the co-option, by various prophets of the 2012 non-apocalypse, of various aspects of the work of Zecharia Sitchin. An anti-conventionalist guru of 'hidden lost knowledge' and a belief in an imminent end of the world sit well with New Age conceit and misanthropy.

THE EYES OF TRUTH

One of the most active current exponents of a relation between crop circles and ancient astronauts is Cheltenham taxi driver Andrew Pyrka. Perhaps not insignificantly his website (www.cropcirclewisdom.com) bears the legend "the eyes of truth are always watching you" (see 'paranoia' above). Pyrka has a habit of taking photographs of crop circles and Wiltshire scenes in which he finds aliens amid the corn (or hiding in hedges, as the case may be). One of his more remarkable pictures was taken at a formation made near the Rollright Stones, Oxfordshire, in 2009. In one part of the photo is a trick of the light – or the face of a giant hamster, or possibly a rather large pooch – that Pyrka artistically interprets as an alien on a kind of sled or intergalactic Sinclair C5 or, as he calls it, a "funky scooter". He later made a model of it, which he was kind enough to demonstrate to viewers of Matthew Williams's webcast CirclemakersTV (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq6hOCs_gkU). Those familiar with duck:rabbit visual effects will note that one can deploy selective vision on the dark parts of the 'dog's face' and discern a small creature, with very big feet, seated with its knees up and its head slightly bowed.[7]

Elsewhere, on his Facebook page (www.facebook.com/pages/Report-A-Crop-Circle-Formation/111802482166171), Pyrka presents these pictures in association with a small sculpture, which he labels rather vaguely as "Several Thousand Years old! This artifact was found in South America and made in Ledite"[8] Assuming that this is a genuine antique artefact, there is indeed a resemblance between it and what Pyrka chooses to see in his photograph. Pyrka is careful to embrace the currently fashionable (albeit accurate) assumption in the croppie world that crop circles are made by people, but insists that the finished works attract alien entities – which he, unusually, is fortunate enough to be able to photograph. And the "observing entities", he is very insistent, have been around for a very long time, have been watching us all the time, and are doing so now, always. This is surely von Dänikenism brought right up to date. FT

NOTES & REFERENCES

1 Lovecraft quotation from Jason Colavito, "Charioteer of the Gods", http://jcolavito.tripod.com/lostcivilizations/id26.html; originally published in *Skeptic*, Vol 10 No 4 (2004); an expanded version, *The Origins of the Space Gods* (2011, 33pp) is downloadable from www.jasoncolavito.com/origin-of-the-space-gods.html.

2 Robert Story, *The Space Gods Revealed,* New English Library 1978.

3 Quoted by Mark Pilkington, "Zechariah Sitchin Time", **FT173:40-41**, Aug 2003 (www.forteantimes.com/features/articles/199/). Dr Heiser maintains a splendid website, www.sitchiniswrong.com/sitchinerrors.htm, which trashes almost every claim Sitchin bases on his creative reading of Sumerian texts.

4 The Wikipedia article "Ancient Astronauts" has a fairly comprehensive list of authors in the field, for those interested in tracing its history; see also Colavito, *Origins...*, cited above.

5 Cf Rob Irving, "The Trickster's Interval", *Between: Ineffable Intervals*, Wild Conversation Press, pp48-51.

6 This outline of the history of Wiltshire seen as a repository of 'lost ancient wisdom' is based on original research by Rob Irving: personal communications, *circa* 2011–13.

7 Pyrka also claims to have seen the thing moving, recognising it as a being on "some kind of chair which glided quietly and smoothly across the wheat – leaving a slight heat residue on the ground," before it stopped and invited him to photograph it.

8 The provenance of this artefact is somewhat obscure. On his website diary (www.cropcirclewisdom.com/) Pyrka says that, apparently according to Klaus Dona, the South American sculpture was "made in Luddite [*sic*] [and] was found in South American [*sic*] and is presumed to be over 6000 years old."

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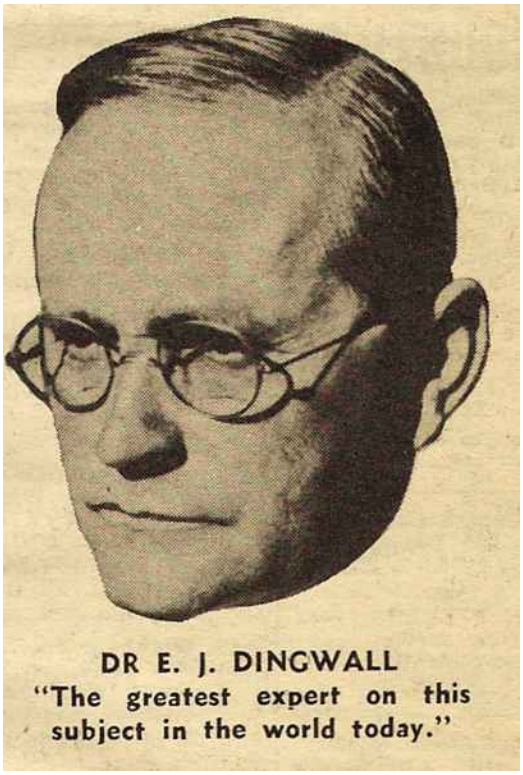
DR DINGWALL'S CASEBOOK

PART ONE: A SCEPTICAL ENQUIRER

Eric John Dingwall, author, anthropologist, librarian, psychic investigator, and, to some, the 'British Kinsey', is less well known than his erstwhile colleague and sometime adversary, Harry Price, but is a figure of equal interest, says CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE.

Eric John Dingwall was born in Ceylon in 1890 (or 1891; he was not certain of his actual date of birth). Like Harry Price (see **FT229:28-34**), he was fortunate enough to have a private income which allowed him to pursue his various interests freely. He studied modern languages at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and honed his librarianship and cataloguing skills whilst employed at the Cambridge University Library between 1915 and 1918. One of his earliest interests was conjuring and stage magic. Having performed his first magic trick aged eight, he joined the Magic Circle in 1909, eventually becoming its honorary Vice President. The secrets and tricks of sleight-of-hand that he learned there proved to be invaluable for his subsequent investigations into séances and mediums. It was as fellow members of the Magic Circle that Dingwall and Price first made one another's acquaintance.



FACING PAGE: Dingwall usually avoided being photographed, but allowed his hand to be caught on camera on this occasion.

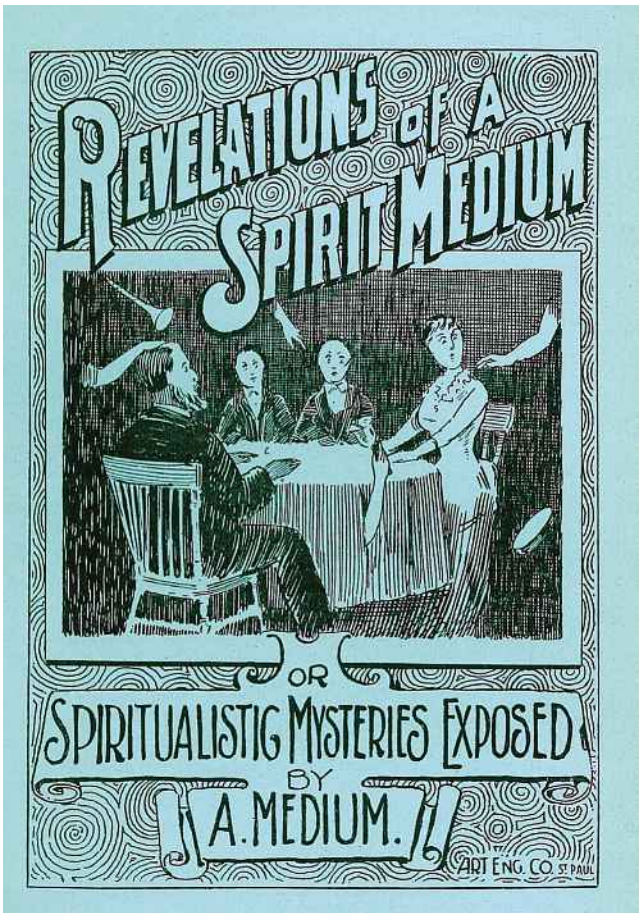
DR DINGWALL AND MR PRICE

Dingwall had joined the SPR in 1920, also holding the post of Director of the American SPR's Department of Physical Phenomena, pertaining to 'physical' mediumship – the manifestation of apports, ectoplasm and pseudopods – as opposed to 'mental' mediumship, or the apparent display of clairvoyance and telepathy. From 1921 to 1927 he sat with various mediums, testing their claims and observing them at close-hand. Price, on the other hand, had aligned himself with the London Spiritualist Alliance (LSA), establishing his own National Laboratory of Psychical Research at their London headquarters; this became something of a rival to the SPR (although Price was also an SPR member) and was subsequently the cause of some friction between the two researchers, as numerous letters reveal.

THE SECRETS OF SLEIGHT-OF-HAND HE LEARNED PROVED INVALUABLE IN HIS INVESTIGATIONS

In 1922 Price and Dingwall collaborated in the exposure of the fraudulent 'spirit photographer' William Hope, the star of the Crewe Circle, a group of Spiritualists who sought to demonstrate the reality of the 'Other Side' by means of photographs which ostensibly depicted deceased relatives of the sitter (see **FT291:46-49**). Originally based in Cheshire, the Crewe Circle had relocated to London under the auspices of the British College for Psychic Science, of which Price was a member. As Research Officer for the SPR, Dingwall was keen to expose Hope, but needed an accomplice who would be trusted by the Circle. Enter Price, who – by means of photographic glass plates marked by X-ray – was able to demonstrate that Hope's method was to swap the plates provided by the sitter with his own, previously created and featuring the images of the 'spirits'.

The ensuing exposure of the imposture



LEFT: One of the William Hope 'spirit photographs' exposed by Price and Dingwall. **ABOVE:** They also collaborated on this resissued manual on fraudulent mediums.

was a worldwide sensation and a success for the SPR. It cemented Price and Dingwall's friendship, to be further strengthened by their collaboration on the 1922 reissue of *Revelations of a Spirit Medium*. This manual, originally published in 1891, was a guide to those tricks of the trade with which fraudulent mediums fooled the unwary. Dingwall contributed a bibliography and glossary, and, with Price, wrote the introduction and notes. But this friendship was to be sorely tested over the years by Dingwall's waspish sense of humour, and his suspicions both of Price's dubious methods and of his craving for publicity.

Later in 1922, Dingwall was contacted by the German psychic researcher Dr Albert von Schrenk-Notzing, who had been testing the gifted Austrian medium Willi Schneider. As an SPR Research Officer, Dingwall was invited to come to Munich and see for himself, and in turn invited Price to accompany him. Willi, despite being 'controlled' by ropes, and dressed in a séance robe studded with luminous pins, was apparently able to cause objects to move at a distance, produce ectoplasm, and to play an accordion with a spectral and disembodied hand apparently fingering the keys. Willi's brother Rudi was also able to produce effects that seemingly defied rational explanation. So impressive were these displays that Dingwall, notwithstanding his scepticism, was at first convinced, especially by Willi. Price, however, was – again, at first – more

DINGWALL AND PRICE ARGUED OVER WHICH OF THE BROTHERS WAS GENUINE AND WHICH A FAKER

impressed by Rudi's abilities. Over the years the two researchers vacillated and argued over which brother was genuine and which a faker.

In 1929, Dingwall publically described Rudi's phenomena as dubious, and queried Price's reliability as an investigator. Price naturally took exception to Dingwall's having "written to the *Daily News* stating that Rudi's tricks were 'well known' and drawing attention to my mentality! But no question of my mentality was involved when we saw similar phenomena through Rudi years ago at Muenchen under what amounted to our own conditions. During this last visit of Rudi we got the following "effects" (I purposely refrain from using the word "phenomena"): several hands materialised, large and small, all three-fingered; several masses of luminous substance, which we will call teleplasm; a handkerchief tied into a tight knot; a pseudopod writing on a piece of paper, plainly visible to all; many levitations of wastepaper basket, bell, table, etc.; a large luminous mass that looked like a young child, trying to push its way through the curtains." [1]

Dingwall subsequently argued that Rudi had used a young child as an accomplice, to simulate the phenomena. Further, Dingwall hinted to others that Price himself had been complicit in the deception! Thus, in a letter to Price from Mrs KM (Mollie) Goldney, fellow member of the SPR and, apparently, Price's one-time lover: "Dingwall's theory is that an accomplice from outside came in at every positive séance – not among the sitters who, of course, were changed from sitting to sitting. So far as I can see this WOULD involve complicity on your part – or at least your Secretary's; as it would involve having a duplicate key... Dingwall confined his accusations to Rudi – not Willi. He seems to remain impressed with Willi's phenomena… Dingwall says he can't imagine how anyone can remain impressed with Rudi – he thinks it all obvious fraud." [2]

In contrast, Price regarded Willi as fraudulent, and, as evidence, offered a photograph purporting to show Willi "totally uncontrolled, holding back a curtain with his right hand"; the implication being that Willi, with his hands free, was thus at liberty to fabricate phenomena in the séance room. [3]

Whilst Dingwall had initially been impressed with Willi's performances, he subsequently adopted a more sceptical position: "I have yet to see physical phenomena under proper conditions and I

know a great deal [tabout the Schneiders to be deceived by them now. Certainly I did not succeed in discovering Willy's methods when at the SPR, although any attempt to do so was blocked." [4]

One gets the impression that both men – seeking to impress upon each other their respective credentials as serious, scientific researchers – had become somewhat embarrassed about their earlier endorsement of the Schneiders' abilities. Thus, Price responded to Dingwall's letter by stating: "I have never said that I was 'convinced': I merely reiterate that I should like to see the effects repeated by someone under the same conditions." [5]

The bickering continued; when, in 1932, Rudi was brought over to London for a further series of séances, Dingwall turned down Price's invitation of collaborating again: "I... have been wondering if you really believe that we could work together… Two more differently-minded people it would be hard to find… After all you have done your share to blacken my reputation with the Schneiders because I think that I see good evidence of their frauds and maybe an alliance between us would lead to disaster. Besides you like complicated séances with much apparatus and I do not... It is a pity because I would dearly like to see one evidential phenomenon with Rudi and not a succession of events dictated by the presence or non-presence of friends in the cabinet and out of it." [6]

RIVALRIES AND REGRETS

Other letters from their long correspondence and friendship illustrate that the two were not always squabbling. Sometimes Price asked Dingwall for advice, once asking him to recommend "the best copyright man (solicitor) in London" regarding a play currently running in London titled *The Poltergeist*. [7] Apparently the script drew heavily upon Price's Borley Rectory books, without his having given permission, and so he was considering legal action. Another letter sees Price again asking Dingwall to recommend an expert. This time, Price excitedly informs Dingwall in a letter marked "Strictly Private and Confidential" that: "I have at last obtained something that both you and I have been hunting for for years – a piece of teleplasm [ectoplasm]! It was obtained, by permission of the "control", from Mrs Duncan [Helen Duncan, the last woman to be prosecuted under the Witchcraft Act, and exposed as a fraud by Harry Price; see **FT116:40-43**]. It is only a small piece, in distilled water, and I am wondering whether you can recommend some one to me as the best man to analyze it... The stuff looks like coagulated albumen – rather like the white of an egg that has been dropped into boiling water, but tougher. I am going to make a preliminary examination… You might let me know what you think about it." [8]

Subsequently, and following a series of investigations by his Laboratory, Price was keen to let Dingwall know that he had not been fooled by Helen Duncan and her teleplasm: "We gave her five séances here and of course we saw through the whole business at the first séance." [9]

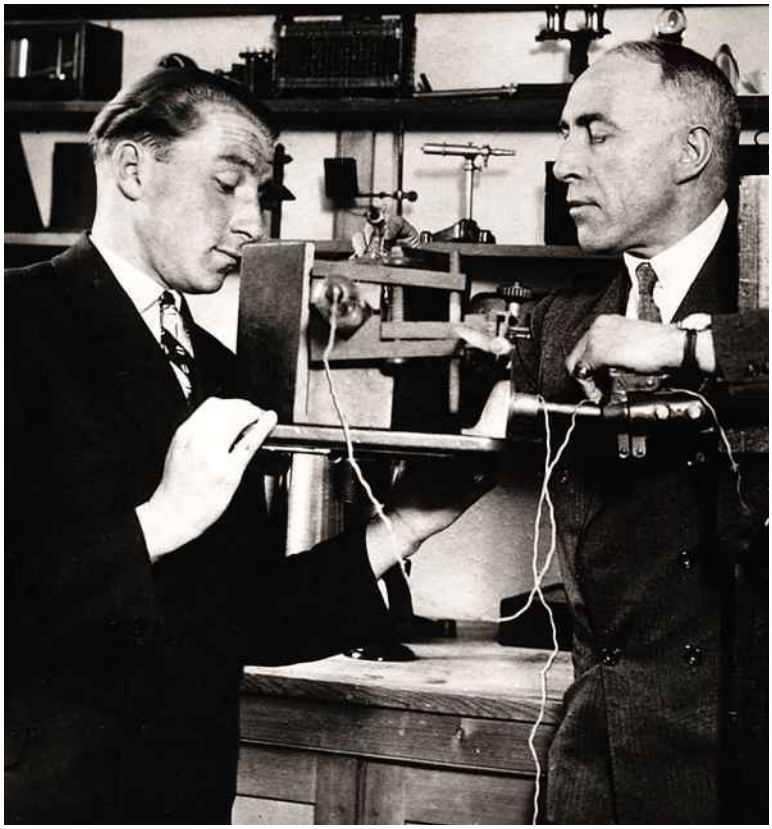
At various times, the two men expressed regret for having fallen out with each other:

"Dear Price, I much enjoyed our talk this afternoon. It quite seemed like old days. I wish we had never had an estrangement. It does seem so mad that the two people who really do know something about the frauds of mediums should be at cross-purposes. I wish you were not quite as you are & I wish I was not quite as I am. But there it is!" [10]

Price responded by writing "I, too, regret that we are not working together – and there is no particular reason why we should not. We could even give the SPR a terrific shaking if we really tried!" [11]

And, much later, after the end of WWII, Dingwall would again lament that: "It does seem such a pity that we two can't get together and co-operate. We know more about the general background than anybody in Europe, and have had probably more practical experience. Both of us are barred from the SPR and are suspected by everyone. Is it because the way we look at things is so different that we can never co-operate in any things? Perhaps it is. I don't know. When we are dead – not so long now – there will be just nobody to investigate the physical phenomena. Of course one snag is that you like publicity and I don't. Not that I blame you for it. We all have our likes and dislikes." [12]

The Schneider affair was not the only source of tension between the two men. Price had loaned his extensive library of magical literature to the SPR, at whose offices in Tavistock Square the books were kept. Dingwall undertook to catalogue and supervise the use of the collection, but this caused a certain amount of friction between them. In April 1923, Price found himself forced to respond to Dingwall's goading remarks that his library was not of interest to SPR members: "You say that only three books



MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY /HARRY PRICE

ABOVE: Harry Price tests the brothers Rudi Schneider (left) and Willi Schneider. Price believed Willi was the genuine psychic, while Dingwall at first favoured Rudi.

have been taken out from my collection. Is that the fault of the members or of the books?" [13] Later, and by way of getting his own back, Price took the opportunity to upbraid Dingwall, admonishing him about the state of the collection entrusted to his care: "I called in today to put some periodicals away, and found that the Dec. No. of the *Magic Wand* (No. 124) is missing. I shall be glad if you will have a look for it. The place is in a great muddle, dusty, and those newly-bound vols of the *Psychic Magazine* are faded at the tops… Do try to have a clear up." [14]

It is evident that Dingwall liked to tease his erstwhile colleague; thus, in 1935, when Price had been investigating Gef, the 'talking mongoose' of the Isle of Man (see **FT269:32-40**), Dingwall wrote: "…how is the mongoose which speaks English? I hope what he says is more sensible than what spiritualists say. As ever, D". [15]

Price was keen to reassure Dingwall that he had always been a sceptic as far as Gef was concerned: "It is curious you should mention Jef, the 'Talking Mongoose', as I am going to the IOM [Isle of Man] on Tues. 30th. I have received samples of Jef's hair, from which I have had photomicrographs prepared. The expert (zoo) says they belong to a dog! How *can* people be so distrustful?" [16]

INCOGNITO INVESTIGATIONS

Dingwall's investigative methods were arguably more rigorous than those of Price. Unlike his media-friendly associate, Dingwall sought to keep his appearance a secret, the better to attend séances incognito, despite his being a well-known figure in paranormal research circles. Thus, in a 1949 article for the *Strand Magazine* ('We ask Dr. Dingwall Twenty Questions on Clairvoyance, Telepathy, Dreams, Magic, and Ghosts') a photograph of Dingwall's hand beside a bookshelf reaching for a book (see p44), was captioned: *"HAND OF A MAN WHO CAN'T BE PHOTOGRAPHED. No photograph of Dr Dingwall's face has been published for nearly 20 years. As he spends much of his time getting evidence on fake mediums and fraudulent "healers," he is understandably anxious not to be recognised when he goes to séances and meetings. But he allowed us to photograph his hand reaching into the shelves marked "Ghosts" in his vast library in Cambridge."*

The *Strand Magazine* piece gives some indications of Dingwall's sceptical position on the paranormal; thus, in response to being asked about the veracity of 'second sight', he answered: "Second sight is a vague term. There are many recorded instances of apparently remarkable cases of second sight, telepathy, and clairvoyance. But in none so far has there been incontrovertible proof of supernormal powers. Scientific tests to establish some proof could be made today, but in the last 15 years hardly anybody has turned up to try to pass the tests. We're still waiting."

HIS INVESTIGATIVE METHODS WERE ARGUABLY MORE RIGOROUS THAN THOSE OF PRICE

Nevertheless, describing a recent experiment into telepathy conducted by Dutch psychologists, he was prepared to acknowledge that, "the results were far better than the laws of chance allowed, and it is not easy to say how they can be described in terms of normality. In fact the evidence for telepathy of this kind is now piling up." Dingwall did not claim that all practitioners of mediumship, clairvoyance and the like were frauds – but neither did he discount the possibility of self-delusion: "I have met many people who are quite sincere, but at the same time are honestly mistaken in thinking they have supernatural powers."

Elsewhere, in his *How to go to a Medium: a Manual of Instruction* he argued that mediums were often psychologically-disordered individuals: "mediums as a class… are very easily dissociated in a much more pronounced way than is usual with normal people." [17] The book was intended to be a practical guide for novice investigators or sitters: "Before a person goes to consult or experiment with a medium, it would be as well for him to know something of the elements of psychology, so that he may have some acquaintance of the processes at work," [18] He goes on to explain, in layman's terms, how the unconscious mind and the process of dissociation may often be responsible for such phenomena as automatic writing, and

PHOTO OF EJD'S 'BOX OF NECESSITIES'(A-I) MS912/153 COPYRIGHT SENATE HOUSE LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON/CHARLES HARROWELL

TOP: Dingwall's "Box of necessities for haunting and poltergeist investigations". This contained, amongst other items, a compass, cotton thread to 'control' the medium by connecting their arms or legs to those of the investigator, and luminous pins that could be attached to the medium's clothing, making any movements visible.

information received by means of the Ouija board or similar devices: "The main point to remember is that in these automatic processes, the subject's own mind is at work and the results obtained can often be seen to be a product of his own subconscious mind, by which is meant simply that part of his mental processes which lies beneath the threshold of consciousness.[19]

Dingwall also advised the investigator or 'sitter' to wear "nothing distinctive, such as clerical garb, mourning, nurse's uniform or livery" for fear of these offering clues to a medium using a 'cold reading' method. Similarly, if the medium were to say (for example): "I see a gentleman standing by you and hear the name John. I think it is your father", Dingwall cautioned the sitter not to reply, "No, it is my grandfather" as "that is giving the medium wholly gratuitous information." Instead, he advised the sitter to respond with something like: "Yes, go on, I should like to hear some more about the gentleman."[20]

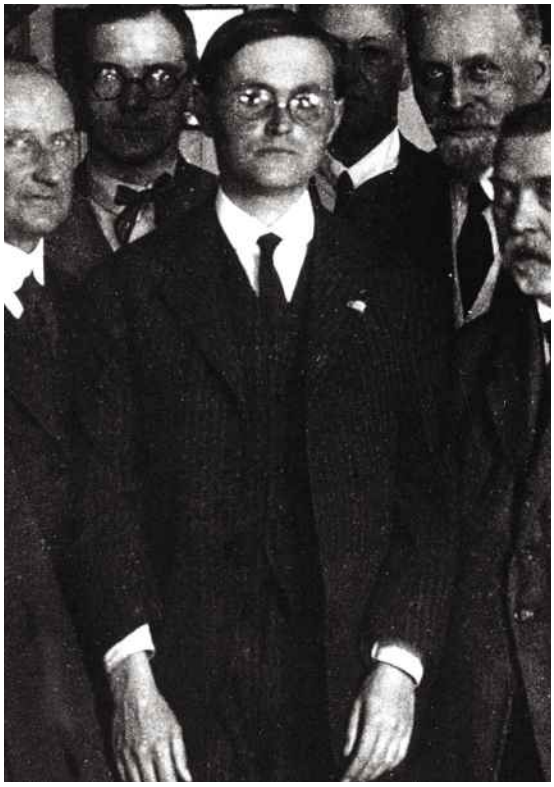
An essential piece of equipment used by Dingwall for his investigations was his "box of necessities for haunting and poltergeist investigations". This contained, amongst other items, a compass, cotton thread to 'control' the medium by connecting their arms or legs to those of the investigator, and luminous pins. These could then be attached to the medium's clothing, so that any arm or leg movements could be detected in the darkness of the séance room.

Dingwall was regarded by other SPR members as something of an *enfant terrible*; he frequently fell out with colleagues who, he felt, were not applying sufficiently rigorous investigative methods. His own specific area of interest was 'physical' mediumship, but some leaders of the Society thought the evidence for such phenomena dubious at best, if not fraudulent. Accordingly, Dingwall swiftly became a controversial figure in the SPR. He retaliated by arguing that his critics did not apply the same high standards when assessing 'mental' phenomena, particularly when produced by non-professional mediums from the higher echelons of society.

An SPR colleague and friend, Alan Gauld, stated that Dingwall "could be difficult, and occasionally prickly, cantankerous or somewhat aggressive", but felt that these characteristics should be distinguished from those arising from his dry sense of humour, as when he enquired of a Spiritualist lecturer: "Tell me, does a tapeworm survive death?"[21]

Dingwall doubted that the majority of investigators were motivated by a genuine desire to discover the truth or falsity behind alleged psychic phenomena; instead, he suspected them to be merely seeking supporting evidence for their pre-existent beliefs in Spiritualism or other occult tenets. They were therefore unwilling to accept that fraud and deception were frequent factors. Dingwall was different. He noted that: "My attitude is always characterized as the limit of cynicism. But I think I know my fellow mortals pretty well and the motivation which inspires them!"[22] So reluctant was he to acknowledge any phenomena as being proof positive of the paranormal that some Society members concluded Dingwall to be an utter sceptic, citing his remarks after having attended a séance and witnessing the table move, apparently of its own volition: "I didn't do that. You didn't do that. Hallucination. Must have been."[23] A phrase uttered by Dingwall upon learning of, or witnessing, some seemingly paranormal occurrence became a familiar one to his friends and associates: "Most extraordinary. I've no doubt that there is a rational explanation."[24]

But it is untrue to say that he had never experienced anything genuinely inexplicable. He was perplexed by the pseudopod which appeared during a sitting given by the medium Stella C, and was also unable to explain a cold wind which he experienced when alone with Eva C in her cabinet. And in his later years, at his own home at Crowhurst, East Sussex, he was witness to some strange phenomena: the appearance of a phantasmal flowered dress, a figure in a cloak, and a sense of unease, causing him to leave the room. When he moved to another flat in St Leonards-on-Sea, the phenomena continued. FT



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LEFT: A rare photograph of the young Dingwall, seen here at the 1923 International Congress for Psychical Research in Warsaw.

Next Issue: 'Dirty Ding': Sex and the Séance

Christopher Josiffe wishes to thank Guy Lyon Playfair, Jennifer Smith, and the staff of SHL's Historic Collections Reading Room. *FT* would like to thank Alan Gauld, Leslie Price, Paul Gaunt and Tom Ruffles and Dr Marino Guida for their help.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE is a library cataloguer. He is interested in Western magical traditions, Spiritualism and related movements, primordial religion, and folklore. He likes Northern Soul, visiting prehistoric monuments and birdwatching. He is currently writing a biography of Gef, the talking mongoose.

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forum

Electronic crop circles

GUY LYON PLAYFAIR doesn't know how the best of the crop circles are made, but he knows a man who thinks he does.

GUY LYON PLAYFAIR is a writer, researcher and investigator in various areas of parapsychology and a longtime contributor to FT. His books include *This House is Haunted* (1980) and *Twin Telepathy* (2002).

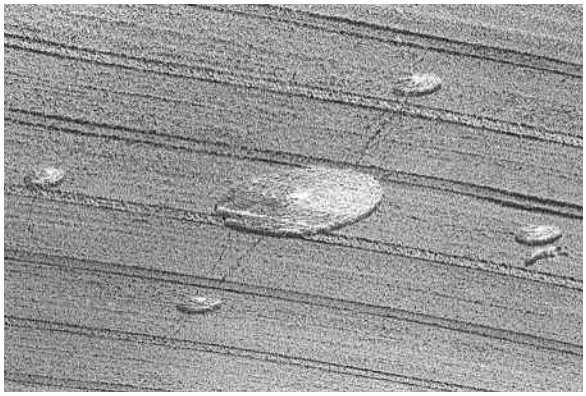
I am no croppie, and have never moved in crop circle circles, but I have kept an eye on the things since I saw my first one from a train as it approached Winchester. That was in the early 1980s. Since then, their development has been both rapid and impressive. It took several millennia for the cave daubings of Lascaux to evolve into masterpieces by Leonardo, yet crop art advanced from the primitive to the highly sophisticated in a single decade. And nobody is sure who is producing the best of it – except of course those who are, and they aren't talking.

When the history of crop art comes to be written, works like the clumsy blob I saw in that Hampshire field will be attributed to 'School of Doug and Dave' (modern equivalents of those pioneer cave artists) who may have been inspired by the probably natural formations observed and described by JR Capron in 1880.[1] Historians will note that the rapid development of crop art took place at the same time as equally rapid developments in the form of what are known as 'directed energy weapons'. More on them in a moment.

But first, a word from Roger, a highly recommended electrician who came round to fix my cooker, did so in a matter of minutes and then happened to notice a magazine on my kitchen table that had one of the latest high-tech crop circles on its cover.

"This reminds me of the kind of patterns I used to make," he said. I plied him with tea and biscuits and asked him to tell me more.

In the 1970s, he said, he was working as an electronics design engineer for a department of a major aviation company. When not working on computer-programmed machines using infrared beams to cut helicopter rotor blades, he and his mates amused themselves by creating works of art.



CHRIS WOOD / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Early crop circles; the Lascaux cave art of the crop circle medium?

"Because they were computer-controlled we could draw any images we liked. We chose complex abstract images of an artistic nature, often with a mathematical element. If I was doing it today I would probably be drawing Sierpinski triangles, Mandelbrot sets, Koch fractals or whatever – just what has been turning up in the crop fields. Things you can't draw by hand, at least not as quickly as some of these circles have been made, nor as precisely. And definitely not in the dark."

But how, I wondered, could you get your work from computer to crop field?

"All kinds of ways. From a helicopter, a balloon or a drone."

I remembered from my admittedly limited reading on the subject numerous eye-witness accounts of luminous spheres, silver discs, and most interestingly of all, because they had been photographed, what looked like glass tubes descending from the sky. Exactly what you would expect, said Roger, if you were blasting a beam of particles from above the clouds down to the ground. The anomalous bending of rapeseed stalks, which normally snap when bent, is another sign, he thought, that they were hit by something from above other than the plank or roller favoured by the hoaxers. Something like a laser or maser beam, for instance.

It may be no coincidence that much of the best hi-tech crop art has turned up not far from the large chunk of Wiltshire to the east of Warminster ominously marked on the AA Road Map as 'Danger Area'. But why, I wondered, should there have been so much of it? Circles and glyphs have been appearing regularly for some 20-plus years and must now number in the thousands. Why so many? Roger explained: "These things are probably designed to knock out invading missiles or whatever. They would have to be capable of tracking very fast moving objects to be effective, and you would need to write complex software to operate them with great precision. The software would have to be tested on a regular basis, and drawing complex mathematical shapes from a moving platform would be a good way to test such machines – just as we used to do on a rather smaller scale indoors."

There are more exotic opinions. In his handsomely illustrated 2002 book on fin de siècle crop art, Freddy Silva allows himself some mystical musings: "The crop circle designs are brimming with the Universal language of geometry, a language recognised by the living cells of the human body, facilitating a clearer dialogue between Heaven and Earth and regenerating the transcendent nature latent in every human... They are harmonic creations of light, sound, and magnetism, and so they are the mirrors of humanity, guiding us to reflect within, unlocking ancient memories and reminding us that we are not egocentric, but cosmocentric."[2]

Phew! To his credit, Silva also noted, after witnessing at first hand an exceptionally intricate design beside the A34 at Litchfield, that "the formation stood out as if it had been etched by a laser". Well it would, wouldn't it, if that was exactly how it had been made?[3]

For me, the most interesting feature of the whole crop circle saga is why none of them has ever been entered for that annual insult to the memory of Britain's greatest painter, the Turner Prize. Not only are they pleasing to the eye, but they arouse a sense of mystery and even awe. Isn't that what great art is supposed to do? Since the originals have a short life before the combine harvester gets to work, there should be a room in the Tate Gallery where photos of the best of them can be preserved. FT

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Cosmic habituation

WILLIAM ASHTON asks why replication of scientific studies often sees the fading away of the original results. What causes this decline effect? Do scientists get bored, or does the Universe itself grow tired of responding?

WILLIAM ASHTON is an Associate Professor at the City University of New York. In his research, he has been trying to replicate another researcher's earlier findings for five years. It hasn't worked.

I teach college psychology, including research methods. At the beginning of every semester I tell my research methods students that ESP is a pseudoscience and that real sciences replicate experiments. At best, I feel like I'm not giving them the whole story; at worst, I feel like I'm lying to them.

Here's why.

Experimental replication, I tell my students, is the safeguard against several problems facing scientific progress. These problems include the original study's results being based on an unlikely event, unnoticed critical variables, the working of unconscious biases of the researcher or intentional deception of (or even by) that researcher. If an original finding can be reliably replicated, then all of these problems can be ruled out.

But there is a problem with replications. I've known it my entire career, but I don't tell my students: hardly anyone actually does them. And then there's a problem with replications that I – and other social psychologists – have only recently learned of: if researchers do get round to doing replications, then the original results, inexplicably, slowly die away.

This slow decline of results is called, unsurprisingly, the *decline effect*, which is seen across the human and natural sciences. A case in point is Jonathan Schooler's research. Schooler, an experimental social psychologist, is a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Early in his career Schooler discovered *verbal overshadowing*: how verbally describing an event leads to poorer memory for the event. Such a counterintuitive finding makes social psychologists famous and leads to further research on the phenomenon. Since Schooler's original discovery in the late 1980s, he and other researchers have found that verbal overshadowing negatively affects memory and judgment in many situations, as diffuse as odour and colour recognition, problem solving and even wine tasting. [1] However, as Schooler and other researchers conducted new experiments on verbal overshadowing, they discovered that the strength of the verbal overshadowing effect declined over time. While the verbal overshadowing effect was still statistically significant, the effect size – the magnitude of the effect – was progressively getting smaller from one study to the next.

The decline effect has been recognised in many human and natural sciences. The effectiveness of atypical or second-generation antipsychotics (Abilify, Seroquel, Zyprexa) has dropped about 50 per cent from the effectiveness measured in the original studies in the 1990s, and the effectiveness of SSRIs (like Prozac) have also declined. [2] Most people misunderstand this and assume what I'm saying is that if one person has been on Abilify for a long time, then Abilify stops helping them. What I'm saying is that a study done today – of first time users of Abilify – finds that the drug doesn't work as well as it did in a study of first-time users done 10 years ago.

In biology, the strength of the relationship between the amount of bilateral symmetry of an animal's physical features (e.g. size of the left versus the right wing) and its reproductive success slowly and gradually declined across replications of the original study. Declining effect sizes are also seen in research on optimal sex ratio in species of birds and the heritability of physical characteristics. [3]

And then we have ESP. JB Rhine's research is a classic illustration of the decline effect. In experiments using Zener cards, the subject Adam Linzmayer began with several long streaks of perfect identifications as well as a general average of correct identifications above chance. But over the next few years, Linzmayer's hit rate declined to chance level. [4] Years later, Schooler, already fascinated by the decline of verbal overshadowing, created an ESP experiment of his own specifically to study the decline effect. Using methods similar to Daryl Bem's research-in-progress on ESP (see **FT270:4, 274:56-57**), Schooler first found an ESP effect and then, over replications, saw it decline. Bem's research on ESP, however, illustrates the decline effect in two ways. First, his *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* paper had nine studies finding ESP, but with no decline. That's not surprising – Bem conducted nine *unique* studies and did not replicate a given method. Secondly, other researchers who are attempting to replicate his studies are finding diminished effects.

So why is there a decline effect? Is it due to changes in the Universe we are observing, or the way we are observing the Universe?

Schooler suggests that it could be either – or both. He talks of *cosmic habituation*. Habituation is the psychological term to describe how a stimulus loses its ability to cause a response after repeated exposures. Thus, the term suggests that after repeated replications of study, *the Universe is getting tired of responding*. During an interview at an ION conference, Schooler seemed to say that cosmic habituation may be a parapsychological effect; the enthusiasm of the researcher may influence the study. Thus, before the first study on a phenomenon, a researcher's excitement is high and this excitement reinforces the effect under study. But then, after several successful experimental replications, a researcher's excitement – and their psychic reinforcement of the effect – slowly wanes. Rupert Sheldrake, Schooler reported, suggested to him that it could be that scepticism among the community of scientists mounts over time and this dampens the power of the phenomenon. [5]

I was surprised that an experimental social psychologist as esteemed as Schooler would publicly talk about this hypothesis, and outright shocked when in February 2011, *Nature* published a short opinion piece by Schooler on the decline effect. [6] The main thrust of the article was to call for study of the decline effect and openness to all possible causes, including causes "stemming from some unconventional process. Perhaps, just as the act of observation has been suggested to affect quantum measurements, scientific observation could subtly change some scientific effects." Schooler suggested a simple method to study the decline effect: create an open and online registry for research studies. Before

researchers begin to collect data, they can record their original hypotheses, methodology and plan for statistical analysis and afterwards they can log their results regardless of outcome of the experiment. This would allow researchers to use the registry to meta-analyse studies to differentiate evidence for the decline effect from more prosaic causes.

Schooler's suggested method for studying the decline effect returns us to the other problem I mentioned about experimental replications: that they are not done, or at most, done but not reported. Thus, the decline effect is obviously born out of how scientists view the Universe.

How could it be that studies are done but not reported? The reality of the publish-or-perish life of a university researcher translates into fierce competition for limited space in research journals. Thus, journal editors have their pick of articles and prefer to publish exciting new studies rather than boring replications of existing research. Very rarely will an exact replication be published. Instead, journals are filled with what are called *quasireplications*.[7] These examine the same phenomenon in different contexts. In biology, for example, an experiment would be repeated on different species; or in psychology, an experiment on perceptions of blame for car accidents would be replicated using blame for sexual assaults. Quasireplications are not exact replications and do not safeguard against the more prosaic problems in science. And these prosaic problems may cause the decline effect. To me, the problems likely to cause a decline effect would be unconscious bias and significance chasing.

The unconscious bias of a researcher can influence the behaviour of research participants, statistical procedures used or not used, and the measurements of critical variables. It is easy to imagine how this would create the decline effect: the young grad student eager to find an effect is strongly motivated, but as they publish study after study their motivation wanes. Their motivation can consciously (outright intentional deception) or unconsciously influence how they measure variables or how they conduct statistical tests.

GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: How can scientists attempt to catch the decline effect in action and identify its causes?

He first found an ESP effect and then saw it decline

Significance chasing can be defined as doing anything to find a statistically significant – that is publishable – effect. Some researchers begin studies with one hypothesis and when it is not supported they comb the data to find anything of significance to publish. Desperate researchers can also change research procedures, use elaborate data set manipulation or statistical procedures. Again, younger researchers are more motivated to chase after significant findings, but as they get tenured and promoted their motivation wanes.

The only way that we can disentangle the more prosaic, rather than fortean, causes of the decline effect is to act on Schooler's proposal. There have been attempts to do this, but they have been isolated, such as psychfiledrawer.org, clinicaltrials.gov and pslcdatashop.web.cmu.edu, which are online pre-data collection registries for hypotheses and methods. A more ambitious attempt began in early 2012 when University of Virginia social psychologist Brian Nosek and about 50 colleagues began the Open Science Collaboration (OSC).[8] While sites like psychfiledrawer.org is catch-as-catch-can, the OSC is very systematic. The group plans to systematically replicate 30 studies published in 2008 in three leading journals, *Psychological Science*, the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition*.

Many social psychologists are concerned about the ramifications of the OSC, especially since other fields in science have not attempted systematic replications. What if – some psychologists worry – psychology finds that it cannot replicate studies? Would this reveal a common problem across many fields of science, or just a problem for psychology? If psychology is the first field to highlight the problem, will funders assume the latter and stigmatise psychology? Ironically, Schooler best summed up this problem: "It would really be a shame if a field that was engaging in a careful attempt at evaluating itself were somehow punished for that. It would discourage other fields from doing the same".

Even an enterprise as rigorous as the OSC will not be able to catch the decline effect in action: the decline effect is the slow eroding of effect sizes and not the sudden switch from successful to unsuccessful study. The OSC will also not be able to distinguish between the more prosaic causes of the decline effect and the cosmic habituation type causes. However, the concerns and motivations underlying the OSC indicate that scientists are now beginning to notice that their findings might be running out… FT

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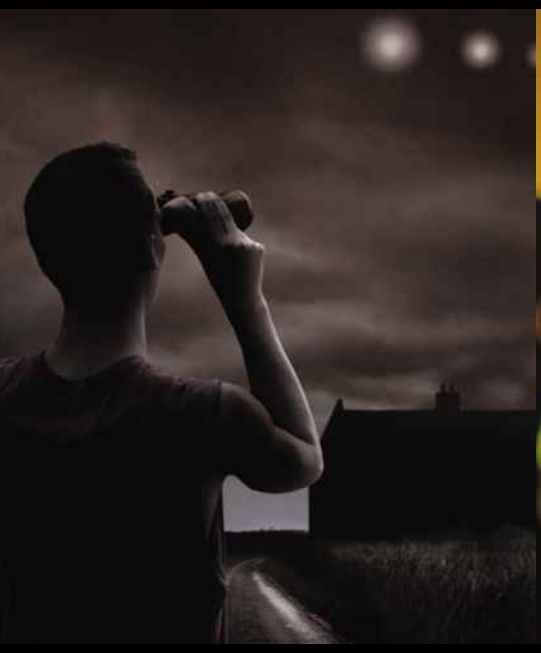

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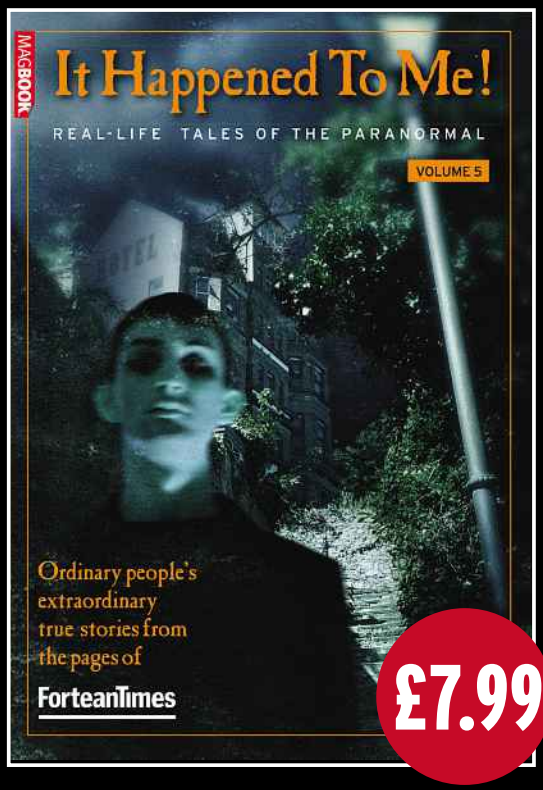

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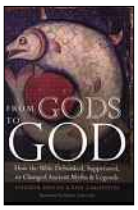

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"The ancient Israelites," say the authors, "believed things that the writers of the Bible wanted them to forget: myths and legends from a pre-Biblical world that the new monotheistic order needed to bury, hide or reinterpret". Shinan and Zakovitch – historians at Jerusalem's Hebrew University – have chosen 30 topics to make their case that the Hebrew Bible (the first five books, the Tanakh or Pentateuch) was "the manifesto of the monotheistic revolution". Where its ancient authors were deliberately vague or evasive, or noticeably silent, Shinan and Zakovitch have reconstructed a fuller meaning using earlier documents from the Jewish, Hellenistic, and Rabbinical (Midrash) literature – and even later Islamic sources.

They illustrate their method with an oddity from Genesis. During the Creation, plants, birds, animals and "creeping things" are referred to generally; but on the fifth day "the great sea dragons" are mentioned specifically. The authors then show that the Babylonians and the people of Ugarit had myths about gods battling huge sea-gods when the world began; the latter, especially, told how the seas and rivers with their allies "challenged" Baal, who subdued them in the form of a great tempest, confining them with shores. The authors accept that the beliefs of the early Israelites were much like their neighbours', and vestiges of these tales survived as fragments about God warring against Rahab the sea monster, the Leviathans, and especially "the deep": e.g. Isaiah: "It was you that hacked Rahab into pieces, and pierced the Dragon. It was you that dried up the waters of the deep." And Nahum: "He travels in whirlwind and storm [..] He rebukes the sea and dries it up."

But these and similar allusions come long after Genesis was written to oppose the neighbouring belief that Marduk, god of the heavens, defeated Tiamat, goddess of the sea, then created the world from her corpse. The description of that battle (in Psalm 18:9–16) could have been designed for von Däniken, Drake and others to parlay into evidence of extraterrestrial intervention: "He bent the sky and came down, thick cloud beneath his feet [..] then the Lord thundered from heaven [..] He let fly his shafts and scattered them; He discharged lightning and routed them. The ocean bed was exposed; the foundations of the world were laid bare..." The authors then draw on Rabbinical sources that discuss the great war at the beginning of the world when the waters rebelled; e.g. "The Holy One blessed be He created the sea, it went on expanding, until the Holy One blessed be He rebuked it and caused it to dry up"; "The One Whose Name is blessed

> **"The Babylonians had myths about gods battling huge sea-gods when the world began"**

trampled on the ocean and killed it"; and Rabbi Yohanan explicitly identifies the "great sea dragons" as "Leviathan the Twisting" and "Leviathan the Elusive Serpent". Behind that short biblical mention of the creation of the sea dragons, the authors reveal "a bustling world of other traditions" in which the implacable and violent gods were vivid metaphors for the raw forces of Nature that had to be subdued by Jehovah.

All 30 topics will fascinate the fortean scholar. 'The World of Myth' deals with the 'serpent' of Eden (before its punishment it was depicted as a winged humanoid 'seraph'); Gods seducing women (much Hellenic influence there) including 'Sons of God' and the gigantic Nephilim; the splitting of the Red Sea; Manna and other divine falls of sustenance; and Joshua's stopping the Sun and the Moon. 'Cults and Sacred Geography' includes the 'Wandering Gate of Heaven' and the Tower of Babel; wrestling with angels and 'seeing' God's face; food taboos; and the worship of the Golden Calf.

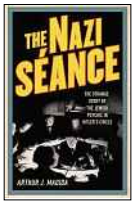
Part Three deals with some Biblical 'heroes' and tries to determine whether Ham castrated his father Noah or slept with him; the 'omitted' story of a fire that did not burn Abraham but in which his brother Haran perished; whether the enmity between Jacob and his twin began in the womb; a tradition that the Israelites were never in Egypt; the miraculous birth and mysterious death of Moses; whether Samson was a Greek-style 'Son of God'; and who really killed Goliath? Part Four deals with the complicated and tribal relations between men and women, revealing deeply traditional views on the status of women and the value of virginity. Several tales are related about beautiful women who are "taken" or enter a royal court pretending they were not married (e.g. Abraham and Sarah in Egypt, Isaac and Rebekah in Gerar, Esther and Mordecai, and David and Bathsheba.) Our authors ask what happened to these women, as some sources say they were seduced while others tell of their heroic piety. Both say something about the sexual protocols of the day; one condemning the debauchery of incestuous foreigners and the other extolling the virtue of a model wife. But hang on – some of these sources say Sarah was Abraham's half-sister! The other stories here tell how falling off a camel became a legitimate excuse for not having an intact hymen; this glides into some bizarre stories of women murdering their violators (a favourite theme of the great female painter Artemisia Gentileschi); and how the riddles of the Queen of Sheba led to the destruction of Judah.

This book is wonderful, not just for its scholarship or for its many fascinating themes, but also because it is, simply, a joy to read.
Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict
A SCHOLARLY, WIDE-RANGING AND HIGHLY READABLE STUDY **9**

A deluded illusionist

He allied himself with rising Nazis and was Hitler's 'honorary Aryan', but Hanussen had a major disadvantage: he was a Jew



The Nazi Séance

The Strange Story of the Jewish Psychic in Hitler's Court

Arthur J Magida

Palgrave Macmillan 2011

Hb, 288pp, illus, ind, $26.00/£16.99, ISBN 9780230620537

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29

In *The Nazi Séance*, Arthur J Magida explores the life of one of Nazism's most enigmatic figures. Born Hermann Steinschneider in the same year as Hitler (1889), Erik Jan Hanussen yearned for fame and fortune. His father was a struggling actor and caretaker of a synagogue. His mother was a singer. From a very early age, Hanussen exhibited a talent for manipulating people. His debut as a comedian was a flop, but after his moment in the spotlight, he joined the circus. He quickly learned to live by his wits.

Hanussen achieved his greatest success as an illusionist and mentalist. Near the end of World War I, he deserted his Austrian Army unit and assumed the *nom de guerre* Erich Jan Hanussen for a show which Emperor Karl I and other members of the royal family attended. He dazzled them with his mentalist demonstrations and became an overnight sensation. Not long after the war, his performance at La Scala in Berlin catapulted him to stardom. The social dislocations that followed World War I produced an acute sense of anomie in the German capital, whose residents sought solace in astrology, palm reading, hypnotism and other esoteric pursuits. As the political centre collapsed, Germany became polarised between the Communists and the National Socialists.

Hanussen was apolitical, charming and suave. He ingratiated himself with those who could further his ambitions, including a rising Nazi, Count Wolfgang Heinrich von Helldorf, who would later assume leadership of the SA in Berlin. Helldorf embodied the Aryan ideal, but his personal life was a shambles. To avoid bankruptcy, he turned to Hanussen, who provided Helldorf and his stormtroopers with much-needed funds during a critical period in Hitler's *Kampfzeit* (period of struggle) before he obtained power. The numerous national elections in the early 1930s had virtually emptied the Nazi party's coffers; the infusion of funds allowed the NSDAP to soldier on.

Hanussen acquired a weekly newspaper and transformed it into a pro-Nazi organ, boldly predicting that Hitler would come to power in 1933. In exchange for patronage, Hanussen sought Nazi protection from the prosecutors who occasionally impugned his mentalist credentials.

Hanussen's past caught up with him. A Communist newspaper exposed his Jewish heritage, which became an embarrassment to the Nazi Party. Ultimately, his relationship with Helldorf would lead to his death. The evening before the Reichstag Fire, Hanussen regaled guests at his 'Occult Palace' with a prediction of a fire that would consume a big house. The next day, just minutes after hearing news of the Reichstag fire, he called the editor of a liberal newspaper and implicated the Communists in the arson. The details of the event are still murky. A young Dutchman who may or may not have been a Communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, was arrested for the arson. Although news of the fire appears to have caught Hitler by surprise, he capitalised on the situation by crushing the Communist and Liberal parties. Hanussen's remarks raised suspicion that he had inside information and suggested that the Nazi Party had planned the event to consolidate its hold over the German government.

Around this time, Hanussen sought to broker a deal over the sale of a publishing empire between its Jewish owner Hans Lachmann-Mosse and the Nazi regime. He hatched the idea of using Helldorf's IOUs as blackmail to increase the price for the publishing house from which Hanussen and Karl Vetter, its general manager, would split the profits. Shortly after Vetter apprised Helldorf of the scheme, Hanussen was arrested by Nazi stormtroopers, though he was soon released. Almost overnight, Hanussen was transformed from an asset to a liability. On 25 March 1933, he was re-arrested and shot. His body was dumped in a forest, where it was discovered two weeks later.

Magida depicts Hanussen as a self-centered yet talented illusionist who fooled himself into believing that he could manipulate his Nazi patrons. Hanussen helped foster the sense of destiny surrounding Hitler. The details of their relationship are still unclear. According to one interesting (but probably apocryphal) account, Hanussen coached the young Hitler in elocution. Other accounts tell of Hitler annointing Hanussen as an "honorary Aryan".

Hanussen often appears as a charlatan. Nevertheless, at times he genuinely seemed to evince remarkable powers of clairvoyance and telepathy. Well-written and researched, Magida's book provides a fascinating look into one of the Third Reich's most interesting benefactors.

George Michael

Fortean Times Verdict

A REMARKABLE TALE OF HITLER'S UNLIKELIEST CHEERLEADER **8**

The Dawn of the Deed

The Prehistoric Origins of Sex

John A Long

University of Chicago Press 2012

Hb, 278pp, ind, figs, notes, $26.00, ISBN 9780226492544

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.99

Any science book that opens with the death of Shelley and within two pages covers autoerotic asphyxiation, penis severing and public hangings certainly has panache.

John A Long is best known for the discovery of the earliest known evidence for internal fertilisation (in a 380 million-year-old fish). The evolution of sex in animals features many mind-boggling discoveries in the fossil record and in living creatures: the Argentine Lake Duck (*Oxyura vittata*), whose corkscrew penis is as long as its body; a massive fossil walrus penis bone; and the fossilised femur tip that Robert Plot mistook in the 17th century for a petrified giant's scrotum. (Long also tells us about palæontologist Alan Charig's failed attempt to have a paper on it credited to his colleagues Drs Cocks and Balls.)

Because much sexual behaviour evolved before vertebrates made it to land and Long is a fish palæontologist, there are a lot of fish involved. He slips in fearsome concepts and terminology without the text becoming too technical by setting them in a first-person narrative about how his discovery happened, was published and went public. As well as telling the story of sexual evolution, Long provides an excellent insight into the process by which a scientific discovery goes from the initial research to the final paper and its reception, and into how palæontologists work. The last four chapters, which encompass everything from dinosaurs to humans, are to my mind less engaging than the fish chapters. They are well-written and full of amusing anecdotes, but they feel a little as if Long wrote them to bring the story up to date, when, in truth, his heart is with the fishes. Even so, this is a very sharp, amusing and informative book, and a must-read for anyone

interested in evolution, sex, palæontology or the workings of science.
Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict
FISH FORNICATING IN WATER AND WELL-HUNG DUCKS... **8**

All Yesterdays

Unique and Speculative Views of Dinosaurs and Other Prehistoric Animals

John Conway, C M Kosemen, Dr Darren Naish, Scott Hartman

Irregular Books 2012
Pb, 100pp, illus, £22.00, ISBN 9781291177121
AVAILABLE FROM HTTP://IRREGULARBOOKS.CO/

This playfully iconoclastic look at dinosaurs persuasively argues that our received wisdom about how they looked and lived may be completely wrong.

The artists behind some of the best-known reconstructions often took only a cursory glance at dinosaur skeletons, but rarely – if ever – went to the trouble of actually measuring them. Charles R Knight, probably history's greatest 'paleo-artist', frequently drew dinosaurs freehand, with little reference to any actual specimens. The depiction of those days of dinosaurs as sluggish lizards (with volcanoes going off in the background) is now outmoded. A paradigm shift has turned dinosaurs into agile, feathered and likely warm-blooded creatures.

But as *Yesterdays* points out, most dinosaur "reconstructions" are really just lazy reproductions of what other artists have imagined before. Most current dinosaur reconstruction show what Naish and Co call "shrink-wrapping" – their skin is stretched tight over the bones, with little or no allowance for the "soft tissues" that haven't survived fossilisation. *Yesterdays* has a go at rectifying this.

Palæontologist Dr Darren Naish – as part of various team efforts, he's discovered three new dinosaur species to date – provides *Yesterdays*' text. Koseman, Hartman and Conway – the book's instigator – are its capable 'paleo-artists.'

Among *Yesterdays*' many surprises is its quilled dinosaurs – recent discoveries suggest fossils of Triceratops and its earlier relatives had signs of porcupine-like quills or fuzz. Then there's a game of 'Spot the Dinosaur' that imagines large and hard-to-see prehistoric animals lying in ambush in spectacular natural camouflage. There's even a 'Can you tell what it is yet?' game, challenging readers to identify an unfamiliar dinosaur – reconstructed as a shambling mass of feathers, a sort of feathered Bigfoot. I won't give away which quite well-known dino it is.

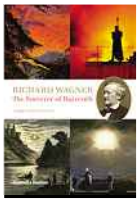
Dinosaur behaviour doesn't survive fossilisation either. Turtles, monitor lizards and crocodiles exhibit 'playing' behaviour, so we're treated to an image of vast, bulky, long-necked dinosaur Camarasaurus at play. There's also a Tyrannosaurus that's not roaring and attacking, but doing instead what it probably did for several days at time – sleeping off a meal of several tonnes. And speaking of behaviour, there's speculation on some of the weirder aspects of dinosaur sexuality, and even some interspecies dino-porn.

By far the best – and the most jaw-droppingly thought-provoking – bit of *Yesterdays* is the 'All Todays' section. Were we non-mammal, non-human palæontologists from the far future with only bones and no knowledge of the 'soft tissue' to go on, we may well have interpreted whales from their remains as a sort of serpentine fish that could swallow large prey whole. Many other logical but completely wrong conjectures by far-future 'paleos' are spectacularly illustrated here. There's a fuzzy iguana, an earless (domestic) cat with protruding fangs and a leathery, skull-like face, tiny-eared rabbits with necks jutting forwards, a hippo reconstructed as an armour-piercing 'apex predator' (based on its massive teeth), and flightless swans with arms ending in tadpole-skewering spikes. It makes you wonder what the 'paleos' of our age could have missed in the dinosaur fossils of the distant past.
Matt Salusbury

Fortean Times Verdict
THE RIGHT MIXTURE OF PROPER SCIENCE AND IMAGINATION **8**

Kampf follower

The grit in the oyster is integral to this study of Germany's musical hypnotist



Richard Wagner

The Sorcerer of Bayreuth

Barry Millington

Thames and Hudson 2012
Hb, 320pp, illus, bib, notes, ind, £24.99, ISBN 9780199933761
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.49

In what sense was the composer Richard Wagner a sorcerer?

As Barry Millington suggests, there have always been two senses (opposing, but interrelated) in which the term applies. On the one hand there's the unique power of Wagner's operas to enchant, transport or transform their audience in a way usually associated with religious or visionary experience.

On the other, there's the sense that such magic is wrought against one's will, a suspicion of being seduced or coerced by music as overpowering and dangerous as a drug. Nietzsche famously articulated both definitions, the former turning to the latter as his friendship with the Master cooled; Wagner was a "hypnotist" so powerful that resistance was required before his "sick" music wreaked havoc across the world.

Millington has written extensively about Wagner, but this latest book – published for the composer's 2013 bicentenary – employs an unconventional approach and draws on recent scholarship to paint a fresh picture of its subject.

Rather than a biography or musical guide, Millington offers 30 chapters, arranged roughly chronologically, that take the reader through the life and works in a series of pithy thematic essays on everything from Wagner's involvement in the 1848 revolution to the mythic and philosophical sources of his inspiration and his penchant for silk undies.

Chapters on Wagner and cinema or the on-going, epic (soap) opera that is the Bayreuth Festival extend the story beyond the composer's own lifetime.

Millington has always berated those Wagnerites who choose to underplay or ignore the composer's anti-Semitism and the co-option of his legacy by the Nazis, arguing that this "grit in the oyster" can't be separated from the works, even if it makes engagement with them a thorny business.

One doesn't have to agree with all the specifics of his argument to allow that it's a well-made and necessary one. Engagingly written, comprehensively illustrated and leaving the reader wanting more, this might just be the perfect short introduction to a man who, so the legend goes, has had more books written about him than anyone except Jesus or Napoleon.
David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
STIMULATING OVERVIEW OF A MULTIFACETED MUSICAL GENIUS **9**

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A Fouke tale

The strange history of the ape-like monster that terrorised rural Arkansas

The Beast of Boggy Creek

Lyle Blackburn

Anomalist Books 2012

Pb, maps, illus, notes, bib, ind, £12.00, ISBN 1933665572

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £12.00

Almost anyone with an interest in cryptozoology will have seen Charles B Pierce's classic low-budget 1972 horror flick *The Legend of Boggy Creek* in which the shadowy ape-thing haunts the bayous and river bottoms, periodically emerging to terrify small rural communities such as Fouke and Jacksonville. Notable for its atmospheric, docu-drama style, the film was based on events and used real witnesses. The end result was somehow more than the sum of its parts, and a man in an ape suit wandering around in the shadows was transformed into something genuinely disturbing. The film had a sense of immediacy – as if such events could happen in your own back yard. No amount of CGI or big-name Hollywood actors can guarantee this sort of impact – as proved by the worthless 2011 remake.

The Fouke Monster, as it became known, has been covered in other volumes on hominids in the USA and worldwide, but Lyle Blackburn's book focuses on this one area, and is all the better for it. *The Beast of Boggy Creek* is also unique in that it looks not only at the sightings of the creature/creatures, but at their cultural and social effects.

There is a detailed history of Fouke, a small town in south-west Arkansas close to the border with Texas, and a comprehensive list of creature sightings stretching from 1909 to 2010. The context is thus laid out for the events of 1971, when a spate of sightings and a physical attack made newspaper headlines around the world.

Blackburn skilfully recounts the whole strange saga, interviewing people who lived through the events, as well as chronicling how the subsequent cult film based on the encounters was made on a wing and a prayer. It went on to become a classic of fortean cinema, spawning a whole sub-genre of low-budget Sasquatch films, none of which captured the brooding menace of the original.

When the dust settled and the world's attention moved on, the sightings continued. Lyle records many such encounters up to the present day, with some of the later examples arguably even more dramatic than the 'classic' 1970s sightings. Many of these have never before been recorded.

Of special interest to both movie buffs and cryptozoologists is a scene-by-scene breakdown of Pierce's film, comparing each scene with the real life events that inspired it. The monster's subsequent appearances in books, records, TV and memorabilia are also documented.

Theories as to the nature of the beast are examined; these include the old chestnut of an escaped ape from a circus train wreck, a *Scooby Doo*-style scare story to keep people away from moonshine stills, and even a horror story invented to discourage black people from coming to the town! The author comes down tentatively on the side of an unknown species of ape, and I tend to agree with him.

Blackburn shows himself not only to be a first-rate researcher but a formidable writer; his book is not just a mine of information but a genuine pleasure to read.

Richard Freeman

Fortean Times Verdict

EXCELLENT HISTORY OF FOUKE AND ITS HOMINID MONSTER **9**

The Symbol at Your Door

Number and Geometry in Religious Architecture of the Greek and Latin Middle Ages

Nigel Hiscock

Ashgate Publishing Limited 2007

Hb, 421pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £70.00, ISBN 9780754663003

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £70.00

Forteans are used to the ideas of sacred geometry and – dare I say it? – symbology (thank you, Dan Brown). But many of the books that propose these ideas fill one with little confidence in terms of the rigour of their research. Nigel Hiscock, however, was principal lecturer in architecture, and author of *The Wise Master Builder: Platonic Geometry in Plans of Mediæval Abbeys and Cathedrals* (2000).

Hiscock claims that intended symbolism would have been understood by the patron and masons of the building, and many of those who used it. So no hidden plans for the final resting place of the Virgin Mary, then… The book pushes against the world view of the Modernist architecture movement that the architecture is the art – architecture for architecture's sake, as it were – and that all historical architecture is an example of form flowing from function. The prologue gives an overview of the arguments advanced in *The Wise Master Builder.* When we get on to the meat of the work, we start with nothing less than Heaven and Earth in Byzantine churches: the dome represents the heavens, and the cube on which it sits is the earth. Then we look at the use and importance of the shapes used in producing the church. Chapter three covers the triangle, chapter four the square and chapter five the pentagon. Chapter six looks at the use of the circle and the epilogue gives us an overview of the whole work.

Everything is profusely illustrated with examples of the relevant shapes in specific locations and in the overall plans. There are enough references and notes. And unlike some, he accepts that sometimes a circle is just a circle: "It is not necessarily suggested that every (shape) by a mason was intended to represent the Trinity and Creation".

Gordon Rutter

Fortean Times Verdict

A WORTHY ANTIDOTE TO MANY BOOKS ON THE SUBJECT **8**

Poor Robin's Prophecies

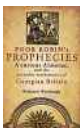
A Curious Almanac, and the Everyday Mathematics of Georgian Britain

Benjamin Wardhaugh

Oxford University Press 2012

Hb, 248pp, illus, notes, bib, £14.99, ISBN 9780199605422

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £13.49



Whether or not we appreciate the value of quadratic equations and algebra when we are taught them, mathematics sits at the heart of our education system. This wasn't always so. Benjamin Wardhaugh's excellent book tracks the changes in attitudes, starting in the mid-17th century, when the term mathematician was open to satire and synonymous with judicial astrology and deception. By the 19th century, mathematics had gone through several changes in public favour. Wardhaugh explores how mathematic knowledge was disseminated through society via almanacs and organisations such as the Spitalfields Mathematics Society.

Wardhaugh outlines how geometry and arithmetic were used in everyday settings by excise men, surveyors and mistresses of households, capturing the tensions between theoretical and practical mathematicians at the time. Examples humanise the changing attitudes throughout the post-mediæval period. There are some excellent asides, into subjects such as the role of satire in almanacs and the rise of lotteries, that make the past feel very close.

A book on the history of mathematics could have ended up dry and exclusive, yet Wardhaugh has written an engaging and entertaining book that never loses its audience.

Steve Toase

Fortean Times Verdict

MATHS THAT INCLUDES SATIRICAL ALMANACS AND LOTTERIES **9**

Sci-fi and fantasy round-up

David V Barrett on a modern fairy tale, a Swindon sleuth, subterranean London, steampunk derring-do and a powerful sequel to Garner's *The Moon of Gomrath*

Some Kind of Fairy Tale

Graham Joyce

Gollancz 2012
Pb, £9.99, 393pp, ISBN 9780575115286

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £9.49

The Woman Who Died a Lot

Jasper Fforde

Hodder & Stoughton 2012
Hb, £16.99, 390pp, ISBN 9780340963111

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £15.29

Whispers Underground

Ben Aaronovitch

Gollancz 2012
Pb, 418pp, £7.99, ISBN 9780575097643

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £7.59

The Aylesford Skull

James P Blaylock

Titan Books 2013
Pb, £7.99, 428pp, ISBN 9780857689795

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £7.59

Boneland

Alan Garner

4th Estate 2012
Hb, £16.99, 149pp, ISBN 9780007463244

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £14.99

Your teenage daughter disappears. Twenty years later she turns up looking no different, with a story of having spent (for her) the last few months in another land she'd entered in the nearby woods, swept up by a handsome young man on horseback. How the hell are you supposed to react?

The story is largely told through the viewpoint of those around Tara, including her brother, whom she was always close to, and her ex-boyfriend, who was questioned as a murder suspect all those years ago. They, and a psychiatrist, try to come to terms with her story, which can't possibly have happened – can it? Graham Joyce is a master of the disturbing tale, and *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* is one of his best: intriguing and touching, as well as a beautiful study on the complex nature of memory and the reliability (or not) of deeply believed accounts of unlikely personal experiences – classic fortean themes.

Jasper Fforde is on the wackier side of humorous fantasy. If you have trouble hanging your grasp of reality on a peg as you enter the first page, don't bother with *The Woman who Died a Lot*. Like Fforde's previous Thursday Next novels, this is a wonderfully silly story full of wordplay and preposterous events within a confusing but well-structured plot.

Most of the action is set in the real world – or, at least, Swindon – rather than inside books. Literary detective Thursday is recovering from her injuries from a murder attempt – but someone is still out to kill her. And they succeed – several times. As she and her dysfunctional family try to find out who, and why, and how to stop them killing her again, they have other problems to deal with. Her son Friday, along with other former time-travellers of the closed-down Chronoguard, is cruelly made aware of both the wonderful future he would have had and the lousy future he will actually have – killing someone in a few days' time and ending up in prison. And her brilliant but troubled teenage daughter Tuesday is trying to find a way to stop God from smiting Swindon. Daft, and a damn good read.

Sticking with fun, *Whispers Underground* is Ben Aaronovitch's third novel about a London cop investigating crimes involving magic. When the body of a young artist is found on the tracks at Baker Street, and the murder weapon is a shard of broken pottery exuding magic, PC Peter Grant suspects there's something nasty lurking in the Underground.

Rooted firmly in and under the streets of London, with a nazareth (a criminals' street market), appearances from our favourite stroppy river goddesses and some thoroughly unpleasant scenes in the sewers, this is an enjoyable read, though not quite up to the first in the series, *Rivers of London* (**FT274:65**).

And a major gripe: this book is littered with typos, including "Can you here that?" (p264). Proofreading is vital; Gollancz and Aaronovitch have let themselves down badly.

James P Blaylock is one of the fathers of steampunk (see **FT295:32–38**), and *The Aylesford Skull* is his first novel in the sub-genre for years. It's not the sort of steampunk that's full of wondrous mechanical contrivances – computers with cogs and levers and the like; it's more a *Boy's Own* adventure story with villains and street urchins and Victorian derring-do, with a supernatural element. It's closer to Tim Powers's *On Stranger Tides* than to Gibson and Sterling's *The Difference Engine*.

It's 1883, and the evil Dr Ignacio Narbondo plans to create a massive explosion in central London while opening a doorway to the afterlife through necromancy, using the skulls of the half-brother he murdered and the kidnapped young son of his old adversary, the eccentric scientist Professor Langdon St Ives. (Fans will recall both characters from Blaylock's previous novels.) St Ives and his friends race to a beautifully-realised seedy and dangerous east London to rescue the boy and thwart the villain.

With lots of action, skulduggery and foolhardy bravery, this is an old-fashioned romp.

A new novel from Alan Garner is always something to look forward to – especially when it's a sequel to *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) and *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963). Colin, the boy in the earlier books, is now a rather disturbed middle-aged astrophysicist. He can remember everything he's ever read or seen – but nothing before the age of 13. And he's searching in the Pleiades for his long-lost twin sister Susan, who rode off with the Fair Folk as a child, and who he can hear speaking to him.

As with all of Garner's novels, the most significant character in *Boneland* isn't a person, but the setting, Alderley Edge in Cheshire, where the author has lived all his life. Living alone in a hut in a quarry, with no electricity, Prof Colin Whisterfield is deeply involved with the landscape, communing with it shamanically, wandering through the woods at night in his academic robes. He has a strange relationship with his psychiatrist – who may be other than she seems. Colin is thoroughly out of kilter with the world that the rest of us see – but in *Boneland* we're privileged to see this world, the living mythic landscape, through both his eyes and those of a Stone Age shaman – and are they any different? This is a wondrous folktale; it's a mistake to take the story (or Colin) on a straightforward factual level, and the ending of the novel re-emphasises the ambiguity of the narrative throughout.

Stylistically *Boneland* is far closer to Garner's more recent adult novels such as *Thursbitch* than to his decades-old juvenile fantasies. It's not a quick read, nor always an easy one; the author makes the reader work – but it's worth it. To get the most out of Garner's powerful use of language, read it as if aloud, sounding each phrase, each word, each syllable in your mind's ear. Haunting.

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Stitches

Dir Conor McMahon, Ireland 2012

Kaleidoscope, £17.99 (DVD) / £19.99 (Blu-Ray)

Many will be lured in to sample *Stitches*' nasty little pleasures by the presence of stand-up comedian and game show stalwart Ross Noble; which is only right, for although this is an assured ensemble piece, it's his central performance as the late, and mostly unlamented, titular clown that could lift this film above merely cult status.

Richard "Stitches"Grindle (Noble) is "the sleaziest clown working the children's party circuit in Ireland" – and, believe me, this vile mix of bad northern comic and every nightmare you've ever had about clowns (with perhaps a dash of BB Thornton's *Bad Santa* thrown in) makes that title even less glamorous than it sounds. Making excuses for his delay turning-up for a children's birthday party (Mother: *"You're late."* Stitches: *"Yeah, and you're f***ing ugly"*), Stitches proceeds to (*no spoiler alert*) die horribly. And I mean horribly. You'll see why this scooped *Total Film's* 'Best Death Award' at its FrightFest outing last year, and its gruesome mixture of humour and extreme gross-out pretty much sets the tone for the rest of the movie.

Fast forward, and years later Tom (Tommy Knight), at whose party Stitches died, is now a teenager, but still suffers terrible nightmares of the event. In true horror-movie style, he decides to commemorate/exorcise this event by… having another party with all his old childhood friends in attendance. Some clown Satanists (joyfully-hammy and perfectly-pitched performances of *The Devil Rides Out*/*Wicker Man* school) decide to resurrect Stitches and much gross-out ensues.

While the ensuing mayhem is both inventive and enjoyable, it also constitutes something of a problem, sacrificing genuine suspense for a series of carefully and cleverly crafted deaths, a trope first taken to saturation-point in *The Omen* (1974) and pursued to (perhaps) its (even more) logical extreme in the *Final Destination* series. We're never in any doubt about who's going to die, just how and when.

Still, that gripe aside, there is much to commend this film. Apart from Noble the cast is made up of young, likeable Irish actors, with special mention going to Gemma-Leah Devereux (*The Tudors*) as a hot little goth groupie going by the unfortunate name of Blowjob Kate, who's as spunky as her name suggests. Writer and director Conor McMahon knows his (proverbial) horror onions with very knowing nods to *Evil Dead*, *Rear Window* and some genuine clown-lore, while there probably aren't too many who could juggle and juxtapose someone having his head opened like a tin of fruit with a houseful of kids rocking-out to Cutting Crew's 'I Just Died in Your Arms Tonight.' Nice.

I asked Noble whether – with his northern accent and muttered catchphrase of "Bastards" – his performance was influenced by comics he'd met? He confessed that the character of Grindle "was very much influenced by the worst: Bernard Manning – the way people thought he was funny, but was in fact just vile."

Noble turns in an iconic performance, putting him up there with (and perhaps owing much to) *Beetlejuice* and Pennywise (from *It*) as one of the great horror clowns.

Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict
ASSURED COMEDY GORE-FEST WITH ADDED CLOWN SHOES **7**

Game of Thrones: Season Two

Dir various, US 2012

HBO Home Entertainment, £54.99 (DVD) / £69.99 (Blu-ray)

After the huge success of Season 1 of *Game of Thrones* – HBO's TV adaptation of George RR Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series – all the qualities that made this epic bonking-and-butchery fantasy-fest so good remain undiminished. While Martin doesn't try to match the depth or mythic resonance that Tolkien achieved, he nevertheless leaves no other fantasy landscape unturned. In this second season, the production values are worthy of his vision, be they the extravagant interiors of King's Landing or the fabulous city of Qarth. Martin also peoples his vast world of Westeros with a cast of could-be stock fantasy figures and succeeds in giving them a Tolstoyan depth and colour. The milieux and characters are so many, varied and memorable that other writers in the genre must be scratching their heads, wondering what, if anything, there is left to do in epic fantasy.

It is a tribute to the quality of DB Weiss and David Benioff's writing that they are able to telescope Martin's vast books (Season Two covers the action contained in the second volume of the series, *A Clash of Kings*) and give coherence and ongoing momentum to the intricate plot threads that Martin has spun out between the warring families. It's a real feat in a fantasy series which is actually so action-light and talk-heavy that the result is so utterly compelling. You relish the treacherous exchanges between 'half-man' Tyrion Lannister and his incestuous sister Cersei Lannister as much as you do Jon Snow's quest beyond the Wall and the upcoming assault on King's Landing by claimant to Westeros's throne, Stannis Baratheon.

Everything winds tighter and tighter through one superb episode to the next, to the penultimate 'Blackwater' and an almighty clash of kings amid a favourite fantasy scenario: the siege. The season finale ends not only with 'Dragon Mother' Princess Daenerys Targaryen making her implacable progress back towards Westeros to reclaim what she sees as her rightful throne, but, also the memorable image of the White Walkers, from a Romero-like Land of the Frozen Dead beyond the Wall, making their equally implacable way towards that towering icy edifice. The next season has a tough act to follow.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict
ADAPTATION OF EPIC FANTASY SERES IS CLASSIC STUFF **9**

Mama

Dir Andrés Muschietti, Spain/Canada 2014

On UK release from 22 Feb

It's surprising that feral children have been seldom used in horror cinema, considering how much mileage you can get from an unkempt, emaciated, five-year-old with a haunted look in its eyes running around on all fours. *Mama* delivers two of them, in what is often a beautifully executed film veering between Cronenbergian horror and

malevolent fairy tale.

A pair of young girls are kidnapped by their homicidal father, but when he crashes his car deep in a snow-covered wilderness, the frightened siblings (with a particularly scary Megan Charpentier as the older of the two) are left to fend for themselves in a creepy log cabin. Five years on, a search team finally discovers the sisters and brings them back to suburbia. But their life in the forest has turned the girls into atavistic savages – and, worse still, something else seems to have come along for the ride.

With producer Guillermo Del Toro at the helm, *Mama* offers a sophisticated cinematic feast, but credit must also go to first-time director Muscietta for the confidence and flair he shows in creating the film's dark and brooding feel. Beautiful set pieces in the decaying cottage or the town's hall of records are superb; the film's story and pace are often perfectly judged, and its shocks cleverly tinged with humour to highlight the girls' strange behaviour as they adapt to the normal world. And as much as I hate dream sequences, this delivers one of the most visually satisfying I've seen in any film.

But *Mama* falls down – as do most horror films – in its rushed and nonsensical conclusion: 15 minutes of lame coincidences, predictable elucidation and tedious CGI wowery that only serves to puncture the tension the film had built up so successfully. Despite this, I wouldn't throw *Mama* from the train – although I might have got off a few stops earlier.

Etienne Gilfillan

Fortean Times Verdict

SUPERIOR HORROR TALE LET DOWN BY ITS AWFUL ENDING **7**

Love

Dir William Eubank, US 2011

High Flier Films, £9.99 (DVD)

Given the conditions under which this film was produced, its ambition is to be applauded. It is also all the more surprising that *Love* manages to impress with its realisation, too.

The film started life as a video project to accompany a new album by Angels & Airwaves, an American art-rock group including a member of Blink-182. The project

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

BLACK SUNDAY

Dir Mario Bava, Italy 1960

Arrow Films, £15.99 (Dual format)

LISA AND THE DEVIL

Dir Mario Bava, Italy 1974

Arrow Films, £15.99 (Dual format)

1960 was a seminal year for the maturing of cinematic horror. *Peeping Tom* and *Psycho* dragged the genre into the realities of crime and madness. *Eyes Without a Face* fused noir, body horror and cosmetic surgery to grim and influential effect. So at first glance Mario Bava's *Black Sunday*, from that same year, might look positively old-fashioned. Its gothic backdrops and busty villagers smack of the by then well-established Hammer, and its black-and-white creaking castles and misty forests have more than a whiff of Universal's Golden Age. But watch it, and you'll discover a film sitting on the creepy cusp of classic gothic horror and modern exploitation excess. The brutal prologue of a witch having a mask of spikes hammered into her face makes it pretty clear: we aren't in Universal Studios anymore.

The plot is cliché, but only because it's been ripped off so many times. A witch is condemned to death and curses her torturers. The rest of the film (set hundreds of years later) sees the curse finally unfolding. Yet Bava grabs this simplistic framework and hangs a succession of stunningly macabre images on it. He was a master of visuals and could make even the most limited set work through a combination of lighting and old-fashioned theatrics. (No one can pull off a frantic coach ride in quite the way Bava did.) And just when the viewer's mind might be tempted to wander from the story, the director springs yet another perfectly framed ghoulish shot that etches itself in the memory.

But the person who pushes *Black Sunday* into full-on iconic status is Barbara Steele. Or, more precisely, her face. She plays a dual role and manages to be both genuinely beautiful and horribly repulsive; not the easiest of feats! That early shot of her staring up from her coffin, wide-eyed and manic, made me shiver when I first saw this as a kid. I watched it last night and the shiver was back. It's not a perfect film, and it feels a little slight at times, but it's the imagery that stays with you. Just make sure you watch the longer cut with the better score called *Mask of Satan*. Both versions look crisp and rich on this Blu-ray.

If you prefer Bava in art-house mode, then Arrow have also released the baffling *Lisa and the Devil*. It's the fascinating and frustrating story of Lisa (Elke Sommer) who stays at a house where the butler is most likely Satan (Telly Savalas, complete with lollipop). There's symbolism and atmosphere aplenty, though at times the story struggles to penetrate. Still, there's poetry here for the patient viewer. Oh, and Savalas is excellent. The film struggled to find distribution so was recut in the wake of *The Exorcist*. *The House of Exorcism* is just *Lisa* edited to incorporate a hilariously bad taste *Exorcist* subplot. The original is certainly superior, but the inclusion of the recut is a stroke of mad genius.

Fortean Times Verdict

BAVA ON FASCINATING AND FRUSTRATING FORM **8/6**

grew into something much more ambitious, with director William Eubank (trained in advertising and pop promos) constructing a space station set in his parents' yard and digging the tunnels for the American Civil War scenes himself.

Drawing on *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Moon* and *Solaris* for inspiration, *Love* follows the impact of isolation on an American astronaut (an impressive Gunner Wright) who has been tasked with re-starting the International Space Station after it had been abandoned for several decades. Terrible things apparently happen on Earth, leaving him alone. Isolation does equally terrible things to the mind, but as viewers we're presented with flashbacks to the American Civil War and the discovery of an 'object' in a crater; a possible alien encounter; and a potential unification between man and machine. Talking head inserts seem to be considering the nature of humanity and the need for social contact. This is all open to individual interpretation, but it is all vividly realised on screen.

It's ambiguous as to exactly what's going on, but if you are prepared to accept that and go with the flow, this is a thoroughly enjoyable film.

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict
THE SEQUEL 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY HAS LONG DESERVED **8**

Three Great Films on the Shroud of Turin

Dir David Rolfe 1978/2008/2010

shroudtv.com £15.99 (DVD)

A rather immodest title for what is ultimately a single DVD containing three films by the same director, David W Rolfe, and a pair of 3D glasses (of the coloured filter variety). The first film is 1978's *The Silent Witness*, a BAFTA-award-winning documentary from the period before the carbon-dating of the Shroud. The second film is *Shroud of Turin – Material Evidence*, made for the BBC in 2008 and the third is simply entitled *Shroud* and was put together as the official DVD of the 2010 Exposition.

Amongst Sindonologists *The Silent Witness* is highly regarded, and it's easy to see why. Well-made, interesting and informative, it deserved its BAFTA – but ultimately there's something missing: the sceptical point of view. We have examinations of the wounds and how they are consistent with biblical descriptions, a look at pollen types found on the Shroud (courtesy of Max Frei, the man who authenticated the Hitler Diaries!) and an analysis of the image itself and the 3D information that is encoded in it – 3D information that is not found in paintings. If a historical overview of the Shroud from its undisputed showings in the 14th century back to the time of the crucifixion sounds familiar that's because it's straight out of the works of Ian Wilson. Ultimately, that's not too surprising as, along with Rolfe and Henry Lincoln, he wrote the film script.

My main criticism of the film isn't its unashamedly 'pro' nature; it's the quality of the transfer. As the title rightly says, it's a "great film", but there has been no attempt to clean it up for this "Collector's Edition": visually it's as dark and fuzzy as a VHS tape. That aside, it remains excellent and watchable.

Since Rolfe's 1978 film there has been much new research – chiefly the carbon-dating which gave the Shroud a severe credibility problem, with the results giving a date of between 1260 and 1390. Rolfe's second documentary addresses this, once again from a believer's point of view. Visually, *Material Evidence* is much more appealing than its predecessor: 30 years on, it revisits the same subject, with presenter Rageh Omaar and snazzy computer graphics and music that to remind us this is a modern documentary. It gives a nice overview of how the Shroud is displayed and protected, along with some circumstantial evidence linking the Shroud to dates before 1260. It's well worth watching.

And then we come to the third film. To be honest, if you've sat through the first two then you can definitely skip this one. It's literally put together with footage from the first two films. It was made for a specific purpose and it does its job well, but in this context offers nothing new.

Quibbles aside, this is still a package that's well worth getting hold of.

Gordon Rutter

Fortean Times Verdict
THIS SET IS ESSENTIAL VIEWING FOR SHROUDIES **8**

SHORTS

STORAGE 24

Universal Pictures, £9.99 (DVD) / £11.99 (Blu-ray)

After all this time, Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) continues to be a source of inspiration/knock-off (delete as applicable) for filmmakers. This time, the little-seen alien creature is trapped within a private storage facility, along with a group of squabbling, sketchily-drawn characters. One-time *Doctor Who* companion Noel Clarke wrote the script and co-stars as Charlie, a man with anger management issues. He's trapped alongside his ex-girlfriend – and a bunch of other hapless monster bait – when a power outage causes a lock-in at the storage facility where they're planning to divide up their belongings. Only these humans are not alone, as something has landed, and that 'something' is even angrier than Charlie. It's well enough made, but lacks any original ideas, so will suit the easily pleased. *Attack the Block* did it so much better. **BJR 6/10**

COMEDOWN

Studiocanal, £12.99 (DVD) / £15.99 (Blu-ray

Speaking of *Attack the Block*, here's another film about London homies under siege in their own backyard which has rather had its thunder stolen by Joe Cornish's 2011 movie. A group of young hoodies hold a party at the top of an abandoned tower block and end up being stalked, slashed and nail-gunned by your usual homicidal nutjob. *Comedown* (the title refers both to our heroes' need to get back to ground level in one piece and the unfortunate situation of being off your tits while being hunted by a psycho) is directed by Menhaj Huda, best known for yoof drama *Kidulthood*. While it's interesting to see him try his hand at a genre picture populated by the same sort of young characters as was the earlier film, the results are uneven. Scares are scarce, the plot predictable and a fascinating subtext about white working class disenfranchisement isn't (perhaps wisely) fully explored. It's a grimly efficient British take on the slasher movie, but not a very memorable one. **DS 6/10**

THE WATCH

20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, £14.99 (DVD) / £17.99 (Blu-ray

When one of his workers is mysteriously killed, supermarket manager and all-round good citizen Ben Stiller decides to form a neighbourhood watch. His recruitment drive brings him a grand total of three ill-assorted volunteers (loudmouth Vince Vaughan, failed cop Jonah Hill and the rather odd Richard Ayoade). They prove unsurprisngly ineffectual, their finest hour being the apprehension of an egg-throwing teenager. Then they discover that the Costco killer is, in fact, an extraterrestrial and that their mission has grown from protecting the neighbourhood to saving the world from an alien invasion. It's all very loud and lewd, a succession of dick jokes and slapstick action sequences; but, being an American buddy comedy, it a) has a soft centre, and b) is as full of repressed homoeroticism as Leslie Fiedler's readings of *Huck Finn* and *Moby Dick*. It's a typical fantasy of male bonding and flight from femininity; the protagonists are defined by their difficult relationships to women (wannabe pregnant wife, teenage daughter, overbearing mother), while the emotional plot arc concerning Stiller's supposed sterility means the film gets to have its cake and eat it. It's deliberately crude, pretty dumb but often very funny. **DS 6/10**

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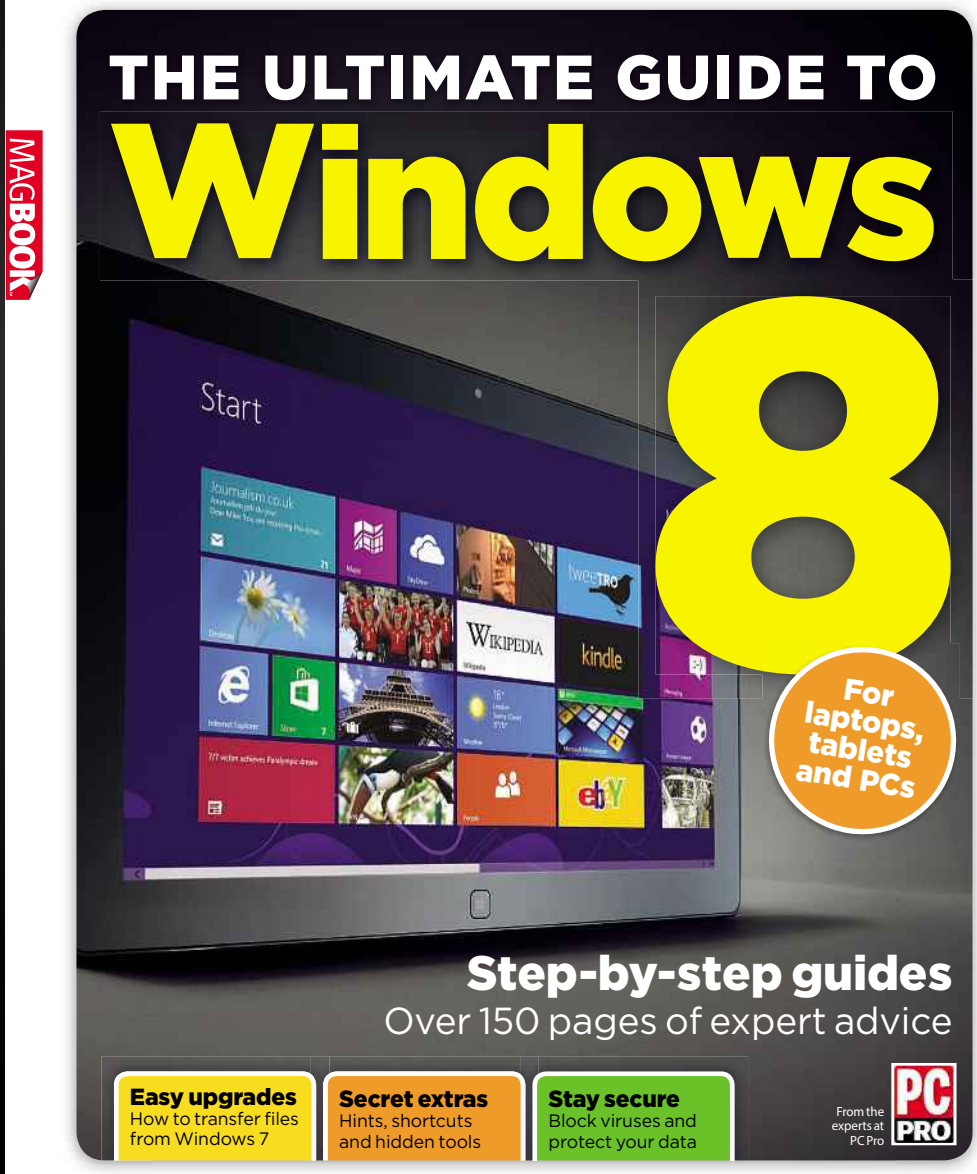

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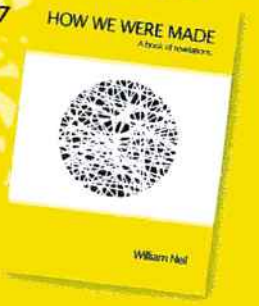

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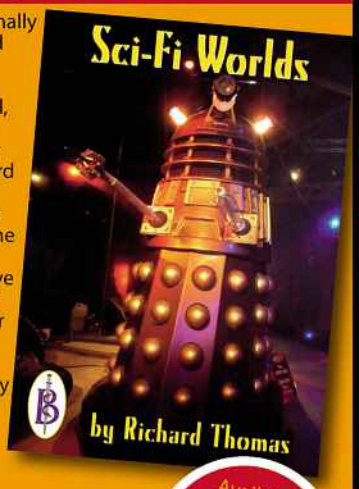

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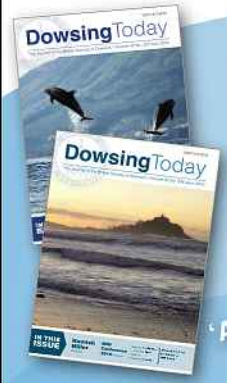

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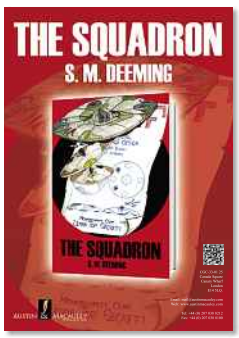

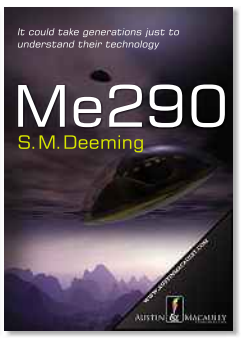

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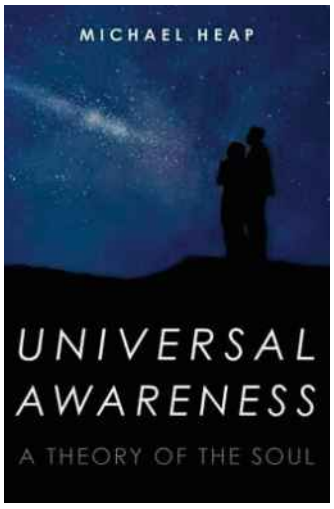

List price: £8.60 ($13.50)
pp 215+xv
ISBN/EAN 13:1463659458 / 9781463659455
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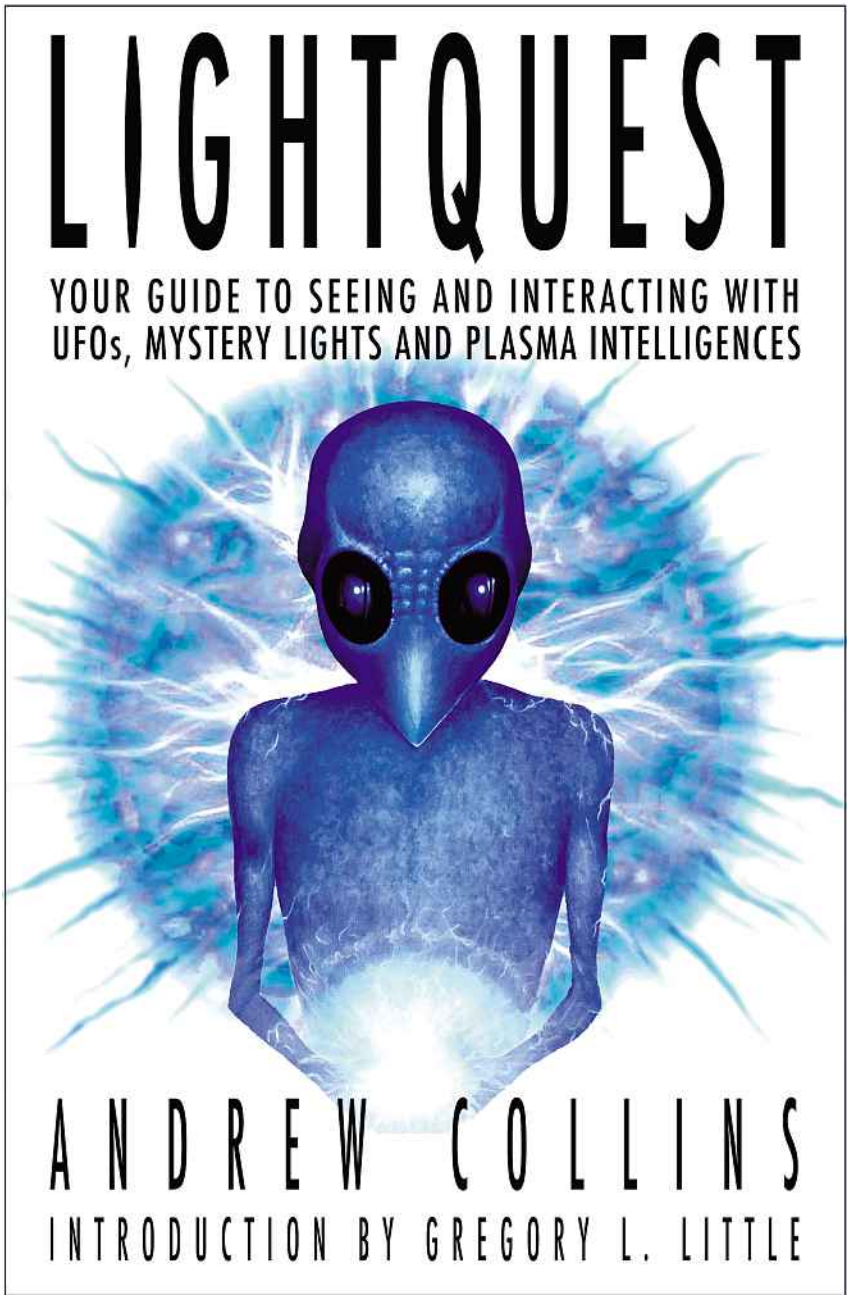
About the author:
Michael Heap is a clinical and forensic psychologist, an internationally recognised authority on hypnosis, and a prolific writer and speaker on skepticism. His website is http://www.mheap.com/

Universal Awareness: A Theory of the Soul
Michael Heap

'Why was I born the person I am?' 'If the person I am had never been born would I have been born as someone else?' Am I the same person over time?' 'What happens to me when I die?' 'Have I lived before?' In this easy-to-read book, the reader is taken on a journey in search of answers to these and other profound questions about human existence. By means of a series of philosophical questions, paradoxes, thought experiments and meditations, and with strict adherence to scientific knowledge, the author guides the reader to clear answers to these questions. Answers that, if they are correct, have extraordinary consequences for how we understand our lives and the basis of our morality.

Universal Awareness may be ordered from CreateSpace at https://www.createspace.com/3640356. It is also available from Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk (paperback or Kindle) or directly from the author (m.heap@sheffield.ac.uk).

A NEW WAY TO EMBRACE THE UFO PHENOMENON


LIGHTQUEST
YOUR GUIDE TO SEEING AND INTERACTING WITH UFOs, MYSTERY LIGHTS AND PLASMA INTELLIGENCES
ANDREW COLLINS
INTRODUCTION BY GREGORY L. LITTLE

LightQuest by Andrew Collins is a new concept in seeing and interacting with the UFO phenomenon. It sees the phenomena observed as the product of sentient light forms and light intelligences that co-exist with humanity, and have done since time immemorial. It reveals what they are, how to see them, where to see them and what to do if you do see them.

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LightQuest is available now from Amazon, Ebay, & Alibris

Signed copies from the author at www.andrewcollins.com

Also available from the following bookshops: Henge Shop, Avebury; White Horse Bookshop, Marlborough; The Barge, Honeystreet; Labyrinth Books, Glastonbury; Happy Glastonbury, Glastonbury; Gothic Image, Glastonbury; Speaking Tree, Glastonbury; Watkins Bookshop, London; Atlantis Bookshop, London; Mysteries, London

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Dear FT...

letters

An alien right here

Regarding the "Emma Woods" affair [**FT2965:35-36**], Peter Brookesmith might not have had enough space to comment on another very peculiar aspect of Dr David Jacobs's approach to abductions. This concerns "Becky", another of his subjects, a married woman with children.

According to a document compiled by "Woods" and circulated privately, Jacobs regressed her between 2000 and 2005, turning up the "usual" abduction material. "Becky" also became Jacobs's webmaster. Then, in December 2004 Jacobs began his telephone (!) hypnosis sessions with "Emma".

In my opinion, there appeared another kind of monster, the one the Bard described as "with green eyes" and "Becky", not to be defeated, created a new story, one really insurmountable: her meetings with a hybrid *living on Earth among us*! Here are some quotations:

"Over the better part of about eight months, I took him to stores [..] and we frequently went to an all-night store to look at [televisions]."

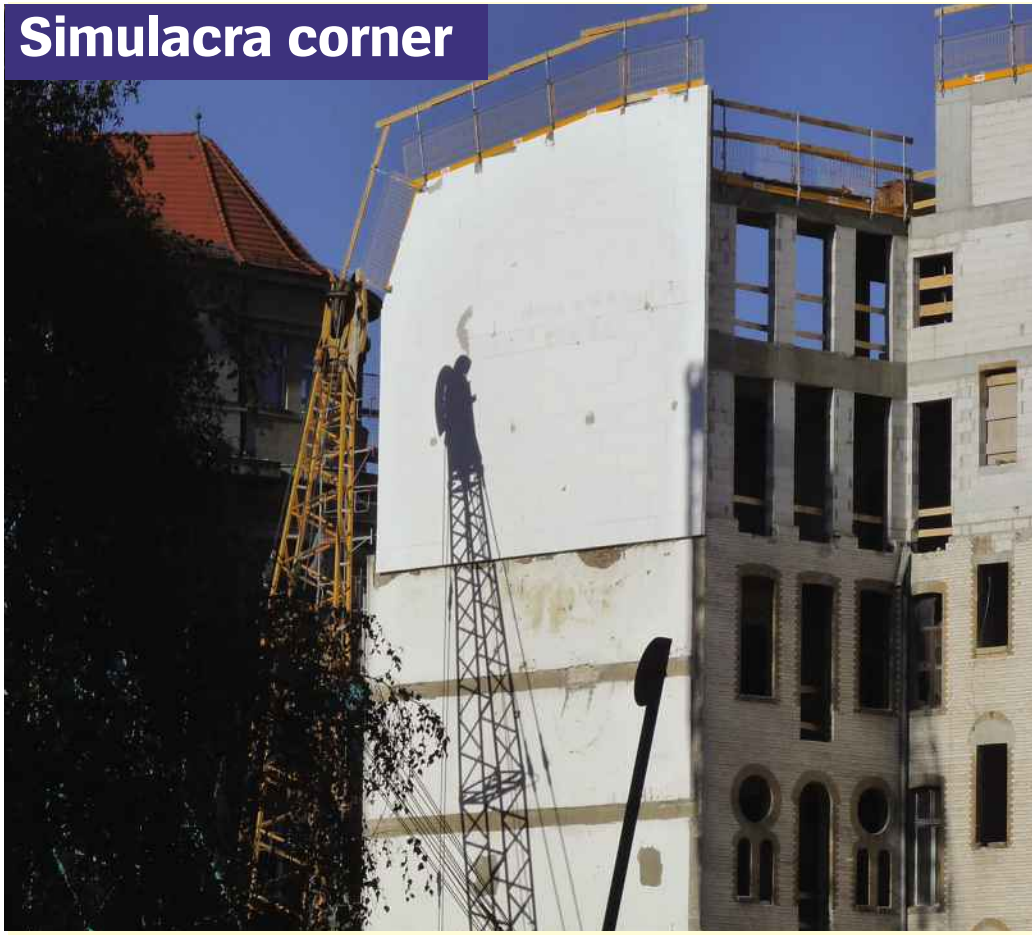
"Eventually, my relationship became sexual [..] For the time period I knew [him], I continued to work with the researcher and [..] I was able to remember the apartment he lived in, and even visited it during the daytime."

Decades of controversy and flimsy evidence – such as star maps, stained pajamas or alien hair found in embarrassing circumstances – could be over.

Dr Jacobs could have vindicated himself and his field simply by paying a private eye to get the security tapes of that store or act as a *paparazzi*. Or, better still in this post 9/11 era, he could have followed Philip Class's recommendation and denounced this "real" alien to the FBI. But what did he do? Nothing. Maybe not even he believes his own stories.

Luis R González
Spain

Simulacra corner



Glen Vaudrey noticed this wonderful angel shadow made by a crane in Berlin in October 2012.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

FT's pastoral role

For someone raised in a church-going family and dragged to church every time the door was open, I have to admit I have learned more about the Bible through my fascination for strange phenomena than in the years of attending Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. One Sunday in church, Pastor Rosetta Elijah of Christ SuperCenter in Eatonville, Florida, called out my name (to acknowledge my interest in forteana) as she read two biblical passages from the *Epistle to the Hebrews* that seem to show God created more than one world:

"[God] hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;" [*Hebrews* 1:1].

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." [*Hebrews* 11:3.]

Pastor Rosetta's church – in the oldest black community in America – is probably the *only* church that has ever had an issue of *Fortean Times* passed amongst its congregation. Church members were fascinated by the article that appeared in a past issue regarding the team of Chinese scientists who in 2010 hacked their way through a glacier and explored the interior of Noah's Ark in Turkey [**FT263:4**]. And believe it or not, that article actually made a believer out of a guest who admitted they always considered the Bible nothing more than fairy tales.

God will bless your publication for helping to save a soul!

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Editor's note: considering FT ran the Ark report on the Turkish expedition under the satirical headline "Noah's Ark found (again)", we have to admit that God moves in mysterious ways.

letters

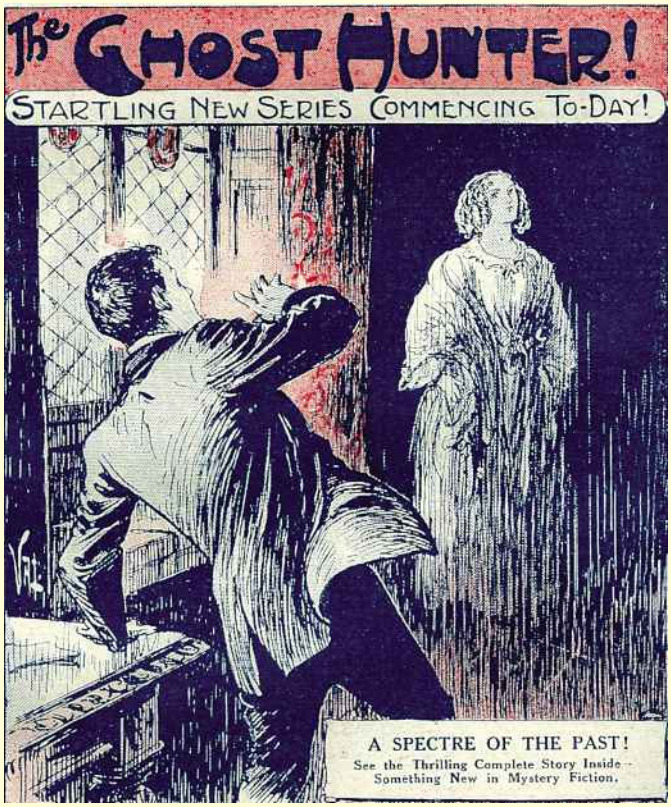
Ghost-impersonating

Further to Jacob Middleton's interesting "Spurious Spirits" article [**FT297:32-37**], it is worth noting that ghost-impersonating was also a popular fictional theme in the so-called boys' weeklies and penny dreadful of the Victorian era.

However, rather than being local pranksters dressed up in sheets terrifying the unwary, the fictional ghost-impersonators in Victorian publications such as *Union Jack*, *Chums* and *Aldine Half-Holiday Library* were mostly robbers, escaped convicts, pirates, murderers, spies and anyone else who required a disguise in order to hide their true identity. Sometimes, the perpetrators were simply schoolboys hoping to fool their fellow pupils for fun. For example, in the 19 January 1898 issue of *Chums*, several schoolboys dress up as ghosts to scare a new pupil. However, they soon encounter a (distinctly fortean) creature with bat-like wings and glowing red eyes, the provenance of which is never fully explained (the implication being that it is a real product of the supernatural). A warning, perhaps, not to mess with things you don't understand by dressing

up as ghosts.

The ghostly forms these miscreants assumed in such publications read like a ghost-hunters' textbook, encompassing everything from Indian chiefs, grey ladies, hooded monks, phantom horsemen and skeletons to the ubiquitous white-sheeted spectre. Likewise, the means used to assume their ghostly forms were various but often involved the use of a garment adorned with luminous paint. For example, in "the Legend of Ravenswood" (facing page), which appeared in the Christmas 1896 edition of the *Union Jack Library*, a 'mystic shadow' with 'horrible gleaming eyes' turns out to be a man dressed in a mask and tight-fitting black suit onto which a skeletal form has been painted with a phosphorescent substance. Another man-skeleton appeared in an 1890s *Aldine Half-Holiday Library* pirate story entitled "the Wrecker Witch of Death Island", and is described as being "over seven feet tall in height, dressed in black, and yet with the outline of a skeleton painted upon him, while his face was a grinning skull". And in another *Union Jack Library* tale from 1899 entitled the "Ghost of Standgap Priory" (left), a jewel thief assumes the form of a ghostly Cistercian friar by wearing a white cassock dipped in a phosphoric solution. We also learn in the story of the extreme lengths the thief goes to in order to transform himself into the apparition: "From various pots, bottles and jars [he] took sundry luminous paints and pigments, variegated in colour, but all sinisterly lustrous, and proceeded to adorn his face and person with them. The actor was preparing for a full-dress performance". The theme survived beyond the Victorian age and some later fictional examples of fake hauntings were as comical in their execution as they were ingenious. The 14 October 1922 issue of the *Champion* boys' story paper, for example, features a spectral, gliding 'Grey Lady' (below left), whose appearance is exposed by central character 'the Ghost Hunter' as being merely "a dummy figure, dressed up in fancy costume, Roller Skates, well-oiled, and some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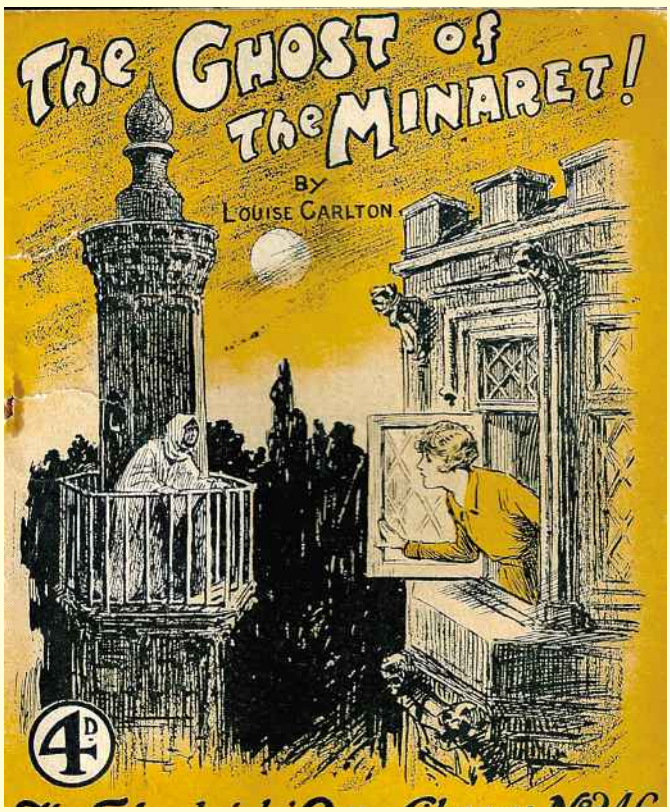


strings". Later story papers of the 1920s and 1930s sometimes updated their fake phantoms with the use of accompanying contemporary technology such as ghostly aircraft, motor vehicles and in one case a phantom tube train!

In his article, Middleton suggests that the behaviour of Victorian ghost-impersonators was based on the tradition of wandering spirits rather than sophisticated contemporary supernatural literature; whilst this would appear to be true to a large extent, it could also be argued that the lowbrow literature of the day might have had an influence on the behaviour of some perpetrators. It is perhaps revealing that the individuals caught perpetrating 'ghost scares' like the one in Derby in 1885 often turned out to be teenage boys or young manual labourers. This was the exact readership profile of weekly story papers and penny dreadfuls, which were primarily aimed at male youths and those with rudimentary reading skills. Many of the fake ghostly characters appearing in this type of literature were depicted as being armed with daggers or pistols, which might explain why Christopher Burrows chose to carry a revolver on his nocturnal scares. Equally, it is likely that the publishers and writers of such stories were well aware of the ghost panics during the late 19th century and incorporated an element of them into their tales during this period. Certainly, this body of fictional written work should be considered another part of the folklore of ghost-impersonating alongside contemporaneous newspaper reports (whether factual or spurious) and the eyewitness accounts of real cases.

Finally, although the real-life practice of ghost-impersonation seems to have largely died out by the early part of the 20th century, it was still very popular as a literary device in juvenile fiction right up until the 1940s. Stories of schoolboy detectives tracking crooks dressed as spooks often appeared in the types of low-grade British wartime booklets produced by prolific 'spiv' publishers such as Gerald Swan and others. The emergence of American horror and supernatural comics in the 1950s seems to have overshadowed and temporarily suppressed the ghost-impersonating theme in fiction; however, after the Comics Code Authority curbed the gruesome excesses of the horror comics, the theme regained popularity in America during the 1960s in the more wholesome stories of the Hardy Boys and later in the highly popular Scooby Doo cartoons of the 1970s.

Alistair Moffatt
Halifax, West Yorkshire

Strobing effect

David Hambling's vanishing hitchhiker piece [**FT298:14**] mentioning the "highway hypnosis" effect reminded me of a peculiar experience. Some years ago I was driving along a stretch of motorway (it could have been the A3 out of London down to the M25) with the sun low behind a long row of trees off to the right. At a certain speed – around 60 mph (96 km/h) – the strobing effect of the trees passing in front of the sun began to put me in a kind of trance – sleepy, inattentive and on auto-pilot. Once I'd noticed, I snapped out of it pretty fast, as it was obviously dangerous. By altering my speed I could hit the exact "tree-strobe" rate at which this took place.

If one went and measured the distance between the trees, I guess one could work out the precise rate – I'd say around 4-8 cycles per second. It'd also be interesting to find out if more accidents happened in late evening or early morning on certain days of the year along this stretch of road. The effect might be similar to that triggered by those "mind machine" flickering light headsets, though I've not tried one. Maybe an experiment is in order....

Rian Hughes
London

*Editor's note: Ian Will noticed this effect while driving through a pine forest in southern France in the 1960s. He found a similar effect using Bryon Gysin's "Dream Machine" in the legendary Beat Hotel in Paris (**FT86:51**).*

Talking cats

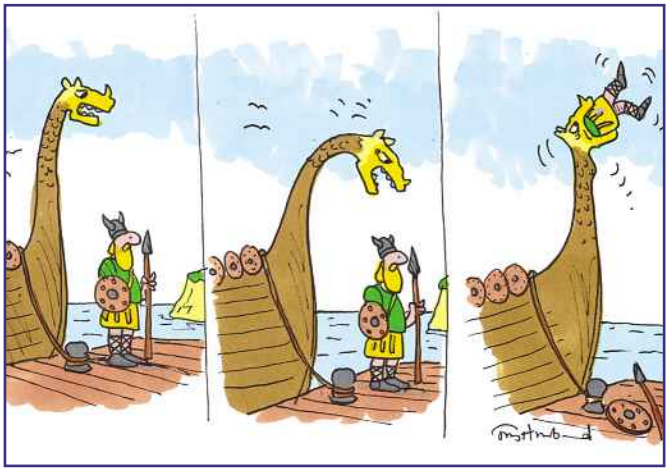
FT's report on talking animals [**FT296:11**] notes a cat which could say the colloquial Turkish word for grandmother, 'nine'. A Welsh speaking friend of mine tells me that the Welsh word for Granny is 'Nain' pronounce 'Nine'. I wonder if cats are similarly able to speak Welsh.

Andrew Brearley
By email

I once had a cat that could say one word in English, which was "now", pronounced like "nnnnnnow!" My calico Precious Cat would stand near her empty food bowl – or sit next to the cabinet under the kitchen sink where the cat food was kept – and say "Now!" If she wanted to go out, she would stand by the door and say "Now!" Later, she increased her vocabulary, and when excited or upset, she would say "Wow! Wow! Wow! Wow!" over and over again. Unfortunately, Precious Cat was found to have cancer at the old age (for a cat) of 18 and went on to Cat Heaven, where I would believe there is plenty of cat food and her dish will never be empty. The world was sadly robbed of this great feline talent.

P.S. Will your fine publication at any time in the future be putting out an issue that does *not* include Aleister Crowley? I'm getting tired of seeing that guy. And so are my two remaining cats! We would like more cute animals from Outer Space, please. Thank you.

Rose Titus
Andover, Massachusetts



TONY HUSBAND

it happened to me...

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

Hollingbourne Wraith

Back in June 2002 I spent a hot few days walking the North Downs Way through Kent. A bare 35 miles (56km) from my destination in Canterbury, I had booked to stay overnight at the Manor Hotel in Hollingbourne. This place turned out to be a magisterial red brick, early 16th century house now owned by two very hospitable gentlemen who had retired from the London rat race. They had two or three spare rooms in which they occasionally put up an assortment of ramblers, businessmen and sightseers. Their house is a fantastic rambling edifice full of original features, including some lovely Tudor lead-paned windows.

After a good night's sleep, I was served a full English breakfast at the large oak table in the dining room. To my right was a large open fireplace, the door to the kitchen was over to my left and directly in front of me was a wall with an old door and a row of panelled windows set back into antique frames. I could clearly see beyond into an unlit corridor with a small framed picture and faded wallpaper on the wall beyond. At the left end the corridor turned at a 90-degree angle to the right, following the contours of the house to another oak door leading, I imagined, to what was once a pantry or storeroom. The right end of the corridor terminated in a set of stairs that led to one of the upper levels. I was on my own in the room and could hear my host bustling about in the adjacent kitchen.

As I was tucking into my breakfast and reading that day's *Guardian*, I looked up and saw an old lady carrying a basket of washing from the assumed "pantry" along the corridor and up the stairs. Her lower half was obscured by the wall, but I saw her top half quite clearly. She was wearing what looked like a black dress, a white apron, and a white bonnet. She was walking reasonably fast and I didn't catch any details of her face, though I presumed she was old by her slightly stooping stature and old-fashioned clothes. I thought nothing of this at the time; after all, it's perfectly normal for a country B&B to employ a maid or cleaner.

After he had finished tidying up, my host joined me at the table for a morning cuppa, and I quizzed him about the history of the house. I am a keen history aficionado with an interest in folklore and the paranormal, so it was obvious that our conversation was going to lead on to the spookier parts of the old house's story. Whilst discussing the extensive renovation work they had been doing over the previous two years, I discovered that the wing of the house beyond the wall was unused. They had yet to do any work there and the doors at the end of the corridor were locked. The staircase I mentioned was unstable and was also not used. In any case it led only to two extra empty bedrooms, both in sore need of repair. In fact, that whole wing was a later 17th century addition to the house, which at the time was completely closed off. The owners didn't employ a maid or a cleaner, and there were no other guests in the hotel apart from myself.

> "I saw the figure of a bald man. He was wearing a smock and a rope belt, and seemed to be floating"

So who was this old lady I saw? I never mentioned the "maid" to my host but did ask if any of his guests or former owners had ever reported any ghostly goings-on. Sure enough, among certain sporadic unexplained nocturnal noises, there were reported sightings of an old lady in various parts of the house, dressed in a servant's garb of the late 18th/early 19th century. I smiled internally and nearly dropped my sugar lump. Without any inexplicable chills, vaguely sensed presences or excited neck hairs, I had, for the first and only time in my life, genuinely seen a "ghost".

David Wingfield
Nottinghamshire

Carrying the weight

I began metal detecting about three years ago and joined a local detectorist club in St Ives, Cambridgeshire. With agreements from the local farmers, one spring day I was invited to a local dig, near the parish of Somersham, where there was thought to be a Roman villa or two. Within a few hours we dug up a few Roman coins, nothing too spectacular. Towards the end of the day, my detector registered a bronze object at a depth of around one foot (30cm). My friend told me it was a Roman steelyard weight, used to measure quantities of grain and other produce. When I cleaned it at home, I saw it depicted the head of a Roman goddess (left).

This is when 'things' started to happen. We live in an old house just outside Somersham in the village of Bluntisham, with its share of loose floorboards, damp walls and cold rooms due to an overworked central heating system – but this was different. In our 'playroom' (an old pub cellar) I have a glass cabinet to display my finds. Late at night, on the day I found the steelyard weight, I was watching TV in the playroom after the family had gone to bed. Suddenly, the glass shelf on which I had placed the coins and weight shattered with an almighty bang. It bore very little weight and was not under any stress. I was quite disturbed.

Over the next three years, the playroom was nearly always bitterly cold. Our fairly new TV set blew up, as did the replacement a few days later, though nothing was wrong with the electrics. The TV remote of various models refused to work in the room, but when we took the TV and remote elsewhere everything worked normally. There were sounds of objects moving on the replacement glass shelf and doors near the playroom would shut with an almighty thud, waking us all up, upstairs, at various times of the night. Our chickens, being quite tame, often came into the house

looking for food crumbs and used to frequent the playroom until something spooked them and they ran out making a massive racket, after which they refused to enter the house.

One evening in late August 2012, I walked to the end of the garden in the twilight to lock up the chicken house. As I turned to walk back, I encountered what seemed to be a wall of utter coldness. There was frost on the grass (on a warm summer day!) and near the outer wall of the playroom I saw a translucent figure of a thin, bald man looking at me. He was around 5ft 10in (178cm) tall, wearing a smock and a rope belt, and seemed to be almost floating. There appeared to be a fine mist between us and I got a bad headache from a high-pitched noise in my head. Almost at once the figure turned around and vanished – I assume back into the playroom. The mist lifted and the cold patch disappeared. Somehow I then knew all this was caused by the steelyard weight, which wanted to return to where I had found it.

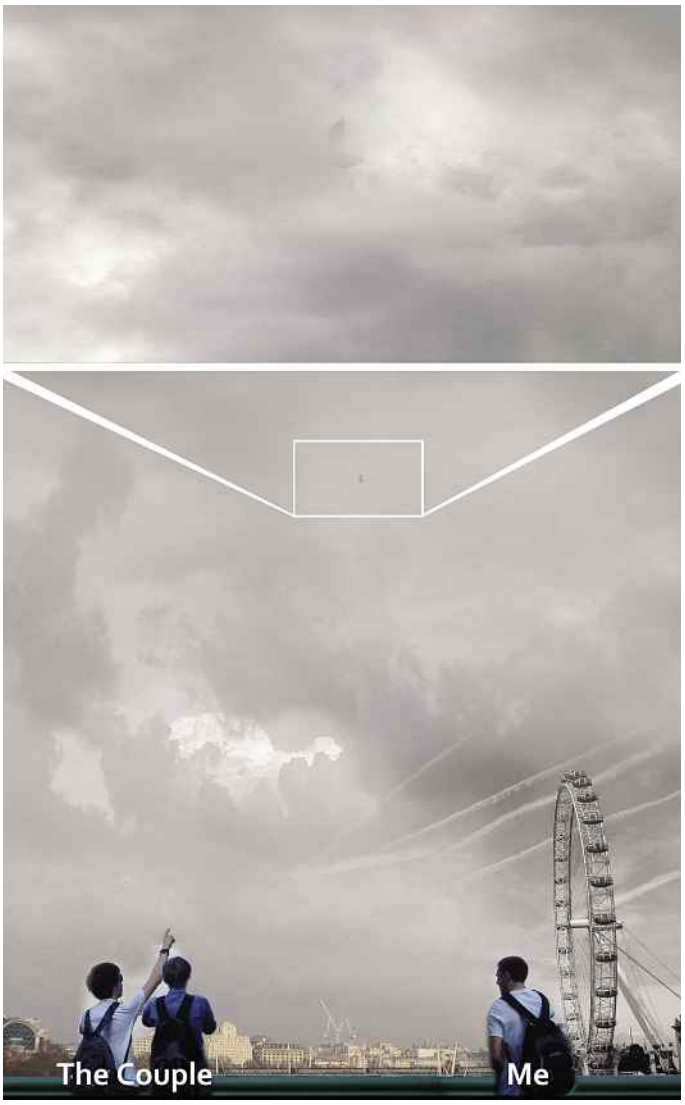
That evening, I wrapped the weight in a cloth and drove to Somersham. Walking for about a quarter of a mile in the moonlight, I located the find spot and buried it in roughly the same position I had found it. Since then, all the eerie phenomena have ceased. Other detectorists have experienced similar weird events with artefacts they have dug up and I advise them to follow my example.

Nick Beer
Bluntisham, Cambridgeshire

County Hall UFO

I have a strong interest in UFOs and wrote my thesis about 'cultural tracking': the tendency for UFOs and other phenomenal appearances (and their narratives) to adhere to the social expectations/archetypes of the observer. Having been reading about UFOs since my teens, I promised myself that were I to ever see one I'd try and be dispassionate and record as much info as possible.

One day in May 2000, at about 6.45pm, I was walking east across Westminster Bridge in London towards The Club at County Hall. About two-thirds of the way across, I passed a couple looking up into the sky almost



directly overhead but slightly northwards. They were fairly enraptured, so I had to find out what they were looking at. Despite being in a rush, I stood against the north railing looking up, just as they were.

Above us in what appeared to be low level cloud was a stationary, silent, dull, 'aluminium/steel' grey metal, vertically orientated cuboid, appearing quite without sheen or lustre in the overcast, but reasonably bright, colourless sky. It was small within my field of vision: if I stretched my arm fully away from me, it was about 1/2 to 1/3 the size of the tip of my finger. However, it was clearly visible above, inside and partially obscured by the lower portions of the (seemingly) low level but semi-dense cloud. It appeared perpendicular to the ground, and our line of sight was at about 65 degrees.

I immediately thought it might be a weather balloon; but the cloud that it was above/within was moving in an easterly direction right past/around it while it was clearly stationary. Furthermore, for a weather balloon to be that size in vision, surely it would have been beneath the cloud layer. And surely even with an overcast sky I would see more evidence of a reflective surface and less evidence of an apparent cuboid structure.

"An out of view helicopter carrying a large metal box on a very long tether" was my next thought – except that it wasn't moving, swinging or rotating, and I assumed I would hear a helicopter, given how close it would have had to be. "OK then – a light unmanned drone thing or kite?" But it was seemingly too big, too utterly unmoving and too silent. The nearest comparison I can give is of a more cuboid version of those short upright metallic cylindrical UFOs that I'd probably seen in photographs and videos. This comparison and the resultant cultural tracking implications aren't lost on me.

I allowed myself five minutes' observation only, else I'd be late. The object didn't move or change size. The couple stayed looking. I walked away, turning back occasionally. It was still there but it seemingly became more obscured by the low-level cloud as my angle to both it and the cloud became more acute. Finally, City Hall obscured it.

I know humans see structure where there is none, but I tried to observe it dispassionately. So – what apparently metallic-looking boxes stay motionless and changeless in orientation, hanging silently in the air at cloud level, against wind speed? I've never reported it because I always thought that someone knowledgeable would turn around and go – "Well, actually weather balloons *do* do that!" and I suppose it's disappointing to be given a prosaic explanation, but I'm old and ugly enough to take it now. So what did I see? Whatever it was, it was flying, clearly an object, and I couldn't identify it; so I have seen a UFO.

I didn't have a camera with me, so I've put together a quick photoshopped approximation of what I saw. It's fairly close to my memory of it.

Tim Barter
By email

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FORTEAN TRAVELLER

84. Santorini: Vampires of Atlantis

Sun, sea, sand and Santorini – the holiday brochure blurbs come easily for this tiny Greek island in the Aegean. A small speck of land, but with a big history and two curious mythic associations, as PAUL DEVEREUX found out.

Santorini (classically, and still officially, known as Thera/Thira) enters the human record with a very big bang. Although the island has been the focus of numerous volcanic eruptions and seismic events over tens of thousands of years, from a human point of view the most notable is the immense eruption c.1500 BC that caused aftershocks, monstrous tsunamis and ash falls that seriously affected the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean region, rupturing the Bronze Age Minoan culture centred on Crete. It also caused the interior part of the former Thera to sink and flood, forming what is today a caldera 10km (6 miles) across, bordered by what are now the islands of Santorini, Thirassia and Aspronissi. Santorini, by far the largest of these remnants, is in effect a crescent-shaped lip or rim of that caldera, with rock walls plunging hundreds of feet down to the water. The islets of Palea Kameni and Nea Kameni within the caldera are lava islands that formed due to later volcanic eruptions. The volcanic and seismic instability has continued with significant events separated usually by a few centuries, though sometimes merely by decades; the most recent was a major earthquake in 1956 that caused death and devastation on Santorini, and the crater on Nea Kameni can still breathe out gases and steam. The volcanic nature of Santorini is instantly apparent to any visitor, not only in the dramatically coloured lava layers seen in the strata of the caldera cliffs and elsewhere, but also in the presence of black or red sand on some of the beaches. This volcanic and seismic history plays a part in the two mythic motifs belonging to Santorini – one relating to Atlantis and the other to vampires.

BELOW: Views over Atlantis? The Sun sets over the caldera and the whitewashed buildings of Santorini.

PAUL DEVEREUX

LOUISA GOULIAMAKI / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

REMEMBERING ATLANTIS

The best-known myth connected with Santorini is that it was part of the fabled lost land and civilisation of Atlantis. The association is fraught with a catalogue of confusion. As is well known, it is Plato's dialogues, *Timaeus* and *Critias*, which are at the core of it all. In them, the story of Atlantis is filtered from an earlier account by the Greek legislator, Solon, who, it is said, claimed that on a visit to Egypt around 590 BC he was told by priests there of an advanced island civilisation that had existed about 9,000 years previously and was destroyed by a cataclysm that caused it to sink beneath the waves. Some scholars have noted that if the 9,000 years given in this extreme friend-of-a-friend tale is corrected to 900 years – due to an error in translation from Egyptian to Greek that rendered hundreds as thousands – then the alleged destruction of Atlantis pretty much coincides chronologically with the catastrophic destruction of Thera. Developing such an interpretation, it could be that the "Atlantean" civilisation is a garbled memory of the Bronze Age Minoan culture on Crete. (If the translation error claim is valid, then it makes Plato's description of the geographic dimensions of Atlantis similar to those of Crete.)

A further linkage to Santorini in this scenario is the existence of the archæological site of Akrotiri on the southern coast of the island. This prehistoric town and port, contemporary with Minoan Crete, was buried beneath boulders, lava and ash spewed out by the 1500 BC eruptions; but, unlike Pompeii, it seems the people of Akrotiri were warned of impending doom by smaller quakes and rumblings before the major cataclysm took place and so escaped – no skeletal remains have been found. But what archæologists have been unearthing at the site has proven to be eye-opening. Here was a place with streets equipped with in-built drainage

ALL PHOTOS: PAUL DEVEREUX

systems running between houses rising to two or three storeys and containing rooms with coloured plastered walls and murals, and it was even possible to make casts of elegant furniture from voids in the ash. Fine, decorated pottery has also been found, some of it Minoan, and the paintings were in Minoan style. There had clearly been close connections with Crete, only 68 miles (110 km) to the south – the Minoan culture is known to have had an extensive orbit of influence, including close ties with Egypt. The gigantic natural disaster that engulfed this sophisticated little town also signalled the disruption and subsequent gradual decline of the Minoan civilisation, which eventually became overtaken by the Mycenaeans from mainland Greece.

There are numerous theories concerning Atlantis, and many geographical locations suggested for it, but if there is an actual foundation for the myth at all, the Thera-Minoan scenario is certainly plausible.

THE VRYKOLAKAS ALWAYS KNOCKS ONCE

Santorini's more secretive association is with vampires – or, more precisely, with vrykolakes which were composite vampire-werewolf-zombie creatures. The lore concerning vrykolakes existed in Eastern Europe, and especially in Greece, but it seems a key focus was Santorini, for reasons that are not clear. It may have been the occasional whiff of sulphur from the steaming volcano on Nea Kameni and the dark sands and blood-red rocks of the island's geology that helped to support this belief – plus the rumour that the volcanic soils apparently can preserve corpses; but, whatever the reasons, the inhabitants of Santorini seem to have been especially plagued by vrykolakes and acquired a reputation for being experts in dealing with them. Some sources even state that other Greek islanders would bring suspected vrykolakes to Santorini to be dealt with.

Vrykolakes were revenants, creatures that could return bodily from death.

They yearned to kill people and needed to drink blood

An ordinary person could be turned into one in various ways. A baby born on a Church holy day or a child whose siblings died would be viewed as likely to become a vrykolakas. Anyone who died without the last rites, had been excommunicated, remained incorrupt after burial, or who had an animal such as a cat or dog jump over their corpse prior to being interred, were destined to become a vrykolakas. Other ways included eating meat from a sheep killed by a wolf or werewolf, and, of course – that old vampire theme – a person killed by a vrykolakas would automatically become one. Also, someone who had become a werewolf during life would take on the vampiric characteristics of a vrykolakas after death.

Vrykolakes wandered by night and day, causing poltergeist-like mayhem, but their full fearsome nature went beyond such mischief – they yearned to kill people and needed to drink blood. One common way for a vrykolakas to select a victim was by knocking on a person's door, perhaps calling out the name of someone living there. If the occupant opened the door on the first knock he or she would get a glimpse of the creature before it vanished, a sight so horrific they would die of fright, and, after burial, would become a vrykolakas. So it became the practice on Santorini, and probably elsewhere, to avoid opening the front door on the first knock and always to wait for the second knock, as a vrykolakas can knock only once.

The other main way for a vrykolakas to kill was to sneak into a house at night and sit on the chest of a sleeping person until they suffocated. This is of particular interest as it is closely reminiscent of "hagging" that took place on another, far-away island – Newfoundland. There, people would awake in a paralysed state to find a muttering and fetid old hag sitting on them. Researchers now identify this type of experience as a hallucinatory condition lodged between dreaming and wakefulness they call "isolated sleep paralysis" (see panel).

A 17th-century source reported that whenever it was thought that a vrykolakas was stalking around a village, the inhabitants would huddle together in one house for protection and send off a brave neighbour to apply to the bishop for exhumation of the corpse suspected to be the revenant. The exhumation would take place on a Saturday, the day of rest for vrykolakes, and the corpse subjected to exorcism rituals for a whole day until it dissolved; if that failed, the body would be cremated. It was in any case considered dangerous to ignore a vrykolakas, because the longer such creatures were left alone the more powerful and bloodthirsty they became. Exorcism, beheading, dismemberment, or putting a spike through the head of the exhumed body were all methods that might be employed, followed by reburial or cremation. The people of Santorini had one further, important sanction against

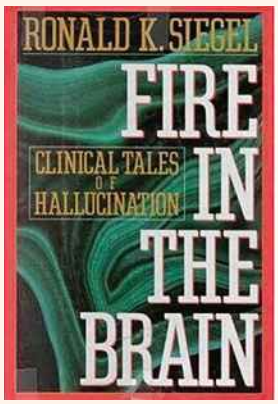
TOP LEFT: The houses of Santorini's capital, Fira, cling to the caldera cliffs.

ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT: The streets and wall paintings of Akrotirii were buried under boulders, lava and ash following the eruptions of 1500 BC.

BOTH PHOTOS: PAUL DEVEREUX

HAGGING

In the 1970s, Professor David Hufford conducted research on a prevailing folklore motif on the island of Newfoundland, Canada, concerning the night visitations of a being the islanders referred to as the "Old Hag". He found that this was not simply folklore, but actual *experiences*, and interviewed many sufferers of such "hagging". The stereotypical experience was almost identical to that reportedly caused by vrykolakes in Santorini in that it involved sleepers awakening in the night with the profoundly realistic sensation of the foul-smelling and muttering Old Hag sitting on their chests, almost suffocating them while they lay there paralysed. There were variations on this basic experience, and Hufford recounted his research in *The Terror That Comes in the Night* (1982).



While there may have been specific reasons why this experience was so prevalent in sparsely populated Newfoundland, the condition is much more widespread, and has been reported from mediæval times in the guise of unclean spirits, *incubi* and *succubi*, affecting sleepers. Today there are online chat rooms in which people tell of nightime encounters with hooded figures or repulsive entities sitting on them and even sexually abusing them. The UCLA psychologist Ronald Siegel gave a gripping account of his own experience in his book *Fire in the Brain* (1993). He awoke around 4am to hear footsteps approaching his bed. He found himself unable to turn his head to see who it was. There was a musty smell and something deathly cold touched his neck and arm while a voice whispered in his ear in a strange language, like English spoken backwards. Siegel then felt a weight descend, and sensed that the still-whispering entity was female, exuding what he described as an aura of dark sexuality. The thing's jelly-like body pressed down on him making it hard for him to breathe. Gradually the pressure and paralysis eased and Siegel was able to leap out of bed. There was no one there.

Most scientific researchers, including Siegel, understand this type of experience as being an arrested physiological situation between sleep and waking in which the partial paralysis common during dreaming still persists while the mind is mid-way through the process of waking up from REM dreaming sleep and the sexual arousal (increased genital blood flow) that typically accompanies it. What most people find hard to accept is how extremely realistic these experiences seem; but anyone who has undergone full altered states of consciousness knows how this can be, and lucid dreams prove the ability of the brain to produce verisimilitudes of consensus reality.

TOP: The forbiddingly craggy coastal cliffs of Thirassia, graveyard of the vrykolakes.

ABOVE: Garlic hanging behnd a Santorini garden gate – just in case...

vrykolakes: they would take the remains of such creatures over the water to Nea Kameni, and, especially, to Thirassia on the opposite side of the caldera to Santorini. If vrykolakes should happen to stir again from their mortal remains, then they would still be kept isolated as their spirits could not cross water, especially salt water. It was traditional for fisherman and other sailors who passed near these bleak lava islands to fashion their ropes into a cross sign before mooring at Santorini's main harbour, Athinios, just to banish any evil influences that may have become lodged in their boats.

In modern Santorini, playground of billionaires and tourists, it is said that the lore concerning vrykolakes is no longer believed in. That may or may not be true, but the sharp-eyed visitor can still occasionally notice protective items such as garlic behind some doors. Moonlight over the caldera, while pretty, throws some long, dark shadows too. FT

PAUL DEVEREUX is an author and lecturer, a research affiliate of the Royal College of Art, the co-founding Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture*, and a regular *FT* columnist. His latest book is *Sacred Geography*.

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LAW COURTS AND WEE

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

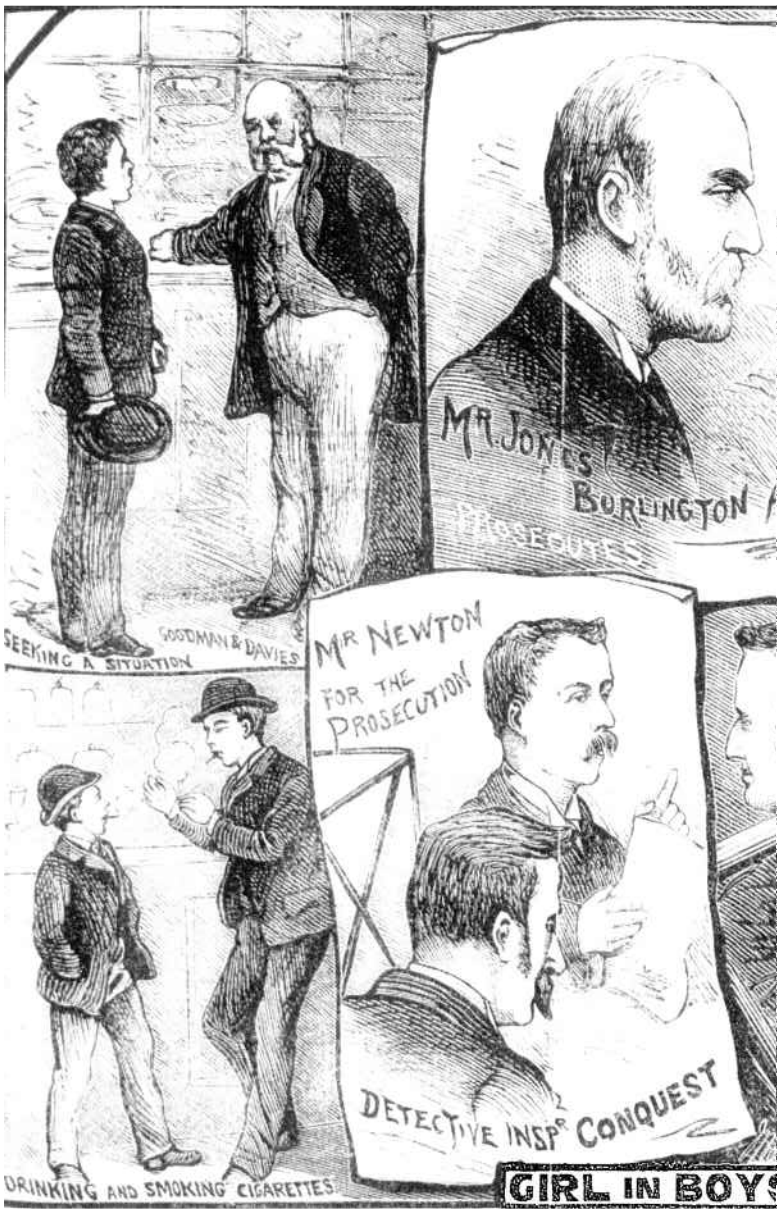
20. DICK SCHICK: THE FEMALE ERRAND BOY

In January 1886, a cheeky-looking young lad who gave his name as Dick Schick was employed as an errand-boy by Messrs Goodman & Davis, the Oxford Street tailors. Dick said he was 15 years old, and that since his mother's work as a furrier could not support the family, he decided to get a job himself. Dick seemed an honest and upright young lad, and although he had a fondness for drinking and smoking at various pubs, his partying habits did not differ much from those of other young London errand-boys. But, worryingly, various garments started disappearing from the tailor's shop. Another boy was dismissed on suspicion, but the thefts continued. One day, Mr Davis saw that the dapper-looking Dick Schick was wearing a pair of trousers and a waistcoat made from his own stolen material! He collared Dick and took him to the Tottenham Court Road police station, but for reasons undisclosed, he decided against pressing charges.

After being fired by Goodman & Davis in June 1886, Dick quickly secured another job as an errand-boy, this time for the respectable glover Frederick Noble Jones, of Burlington Arcade. His mother, Mrs Lois Eunice Schick, gave him a good character. When gloves and other garments started disappearing, Dick became a suspect. This time, the cunning Dick wrote an anonymous note blaming another boy, but after this individual had been dismissed, the thieving continued. One day in October, Mr Jones had the idea of comparing the anonymous letter with some of Dick's handwriting; they were an excellent match. The police raided the Schick lodgings and found some of the missing garments, along with 40 pawn tickets for other items of clothing. This was not the only noteworthy discovery of the day, however; when examined by a doctor, 'Dick' turned out not to be just a Schick, but a 'chick'. The 20-year-old Miss Lois Schick had successfully masqueraded as a 15-year-old errand-boy for nearly a year.

The impecunious clerk William Schick, said to be of German extraction, lodged at No 78 Elmore Street, Islington, with his wife Lois Eunice; here, they hatched seven little Schicks, five of whom survived infancy. The 1881 census has William working as an 'advertising clerk', whereas his wife and his eldest daughter Lois, born in March 1866 and later to become 'Dick', were both 'machinists'. After the death of William Schick in March 1882, the family became near-destitute. Mrs Schick worked as a furrier for a while, and her teenage daughters Lois and Mary also tried to find work, albeit with little success.

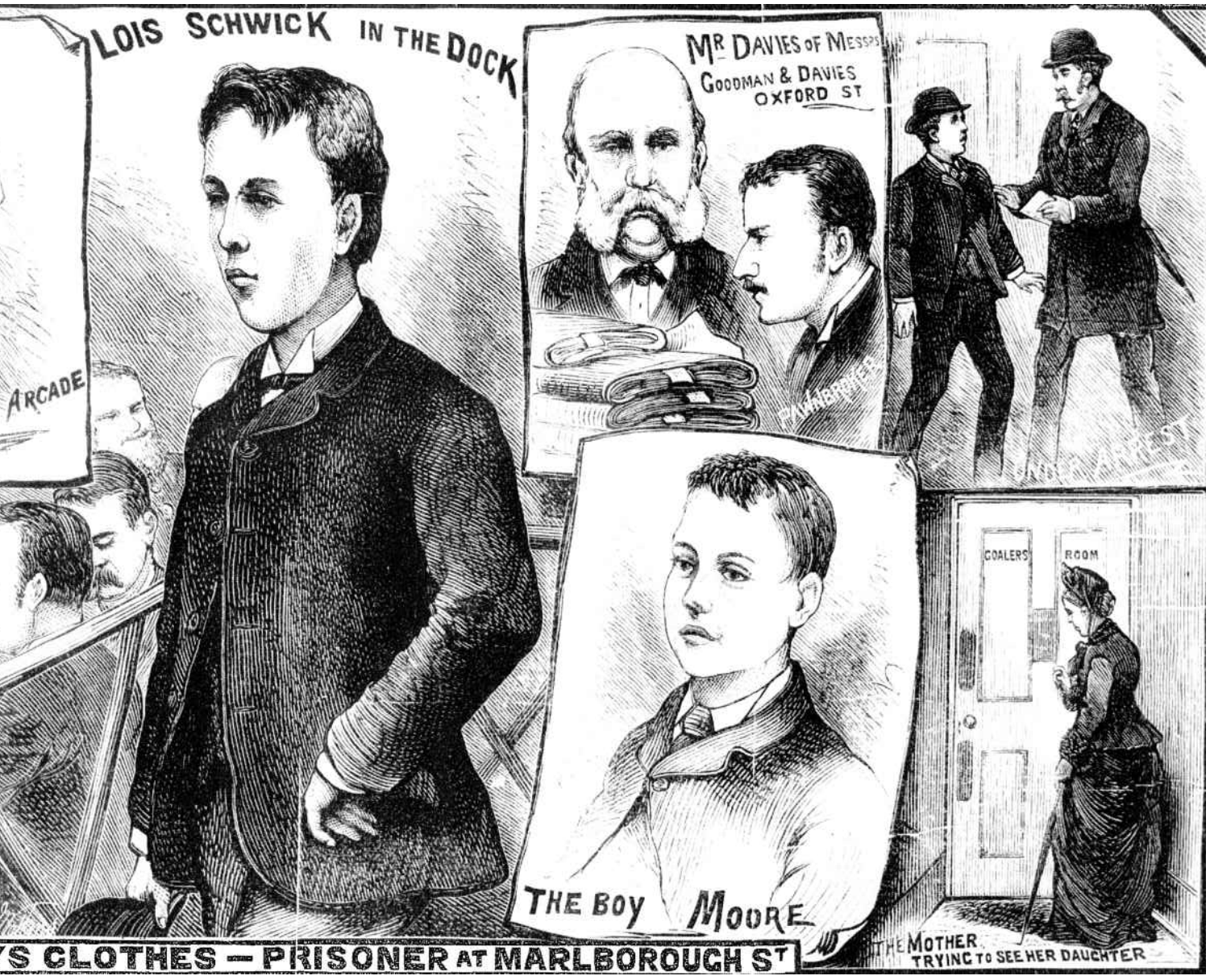
There was a good deal of coverage of the Female Errand-Boy in the London newspapers, although they did not get her name right, calling her Schwick or Schwich instead of Schick. Motivated by a mixture of sensationalism and vague proto-feminist sentiments, the rabble-rousing editor WT Stead tried to put a spin on the 'Dick Schick' case in his *Pall Mall Gazette*: was it not a shame that young women were so discriminated against with regard to finding employment, and had young Lois Schick not been forced by poverty to don male attire? Some other newspapers followed suit, calling young Lois a brave lass, who had just wanted to get a job and support her family. In an interview, Mrs Schick praised her daughter for helping to save her younger siblings from starvation.



The *Illustrated Police News* found the 'Dick Schick' case quite hilarious, and published portraits of its leading characters, including the heroine herself. Also featured was 'The Boy Moore', a young Soho sword-maker who had liked to drink and smoke with 'Dick', allegedly without suspicion that his friend was actually a woman.

When Lois Schick was charged with theft at the Marlborough-street police court on 13 October 1886, she seemed quite undeterred by having to wear her male attire in court, looking as cheeky as ever. The momentum was clearly against her, however: in relentless testimony, her career of dishonesty was exposed. In particular, it was considered 'not cricket' that this artful young woman had twice successfully 'framed' other errand-boys for the thefts, causing them to be dismissed from their jobs. The credibility of Mrs Schick was seriously harmed when it was shown that she had clearly acted

STRATED NEWS
EKLY RECORD


LOIS SCHWICK IN THE DOCK
MR DAVIES OF MESSRS GOODMAN & DAVIES OXFORD ST
ARCADE
THE BOY MOORE
COALERS ROOM
THE MOTHER TRYING TO SEE HER DAUGHTER
S CLOTHES — PRISONER AT MARLBOROUGH ST

as her daughter's accomplice by providing her with a false reference and hiding the stolen goods. An uncharitable clergyman wrote a letter to the *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* to point out that the Schick family had been supported by the parish for some time, that Lois's younger sister Mary had found employment without resorting to cross-dressing, and that Lois had actually posed as 'a nephew' for four years or more. At the Middlesex Sessions, Lois Schick was sentenced to eight months in prison with hard labour, for stealing articles to the value of £75.

The unlikely tale of a jolly, cross-dressing working-class girl amusing herself in Victorian London's shady underworld, and 'nicking' some new trousers when she felt like it, seems rather like the theme for a ribald modern novel; still, the facts are well verified through independent newspaper accounts, and supported by census and demographic records. We know, from the case of Boulton and Park, that London had an established upper-class male homosexual and transvestite underworld. It is likely there were also haunts for young women wearing men's clothes. Lois Schick's motives for cross-dressing were clearly not merely to facilitate her criminal career, since she had been wearing male attire for three years before becoming a dishonest errand-boy.

But what happened to Lois Schick after she had been released from prison? She completely disappeared. Although it is still possible to follow the humble careers of the other Schicks in various demographic records, for example her mother who expired in late 1905, Lois herself is nowhere to be found. Did she emigrate to the United States, or perhaps start a new life as 'Dick Brown' in some London suburb?

Sources: *Daily News 14 Oct, 13 Nov; Morning Post 14 Oct; Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper 17 Oct; IPN, 30 Oct, 27 Nov 1886. There is also a scholarly article about the case by K. Hindmarch-Watson in GLQ 14 [2007], 69-98.*

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

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PHENOMENOMIX

Austin Osman Spare 3

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

A.O. SPARE DEVELOPED A METHOD OF CASTING SPELLS IN THE FORM OF "SIGILS" - LITTLE SCRIBBLES CONTAINING A WISH.

FANCY A SPOT OF RAIN, MATE?

WORLD WAR ONE: A.O.S. WAS CALLED UP BY THE ARMY.

HE TOLD MANY TALL TALES ABOUT HIS SERVICE, AND CLAIMED THAT HE HAD SPENT A WHOLE NIGHT ON THE WESTERN FRONT UNDER A PILE OF CORPSES...

IN REALITY, IT'S LIKELY THAT HE WAS NEVER POSTED ANYWHERE MORE REMOTE THAN BLACKPOOL...

KISS ME QUICK

WHEN THE WAR ENDED, SPARE WAS SKINT! HE MOVED TO A TOUGH SOUTH LONDON SLUM, WHERE THE LOCAL CELEB WAS A BLOKE WHO BIT THE HEADS OFF RATS FOR A LAUGH!

HAHA HAHAHA HAHA

HE CONTINUED TO PRACTISE MAGIC, AND TOLD VISITORS THAT HIS FILTHY ROOMS WERE TEEMING WITH ELEMENTAL SPIRITS!

WHEN SURREALISM CAME TO LONDON IN 1936, SPARE'S FANS PROMOTED HIM AS "THE COCKNEY 'OO H'INVENTED SURREALISM!"

FOR A WHILE IT WORKED...

DOING THE LAMBETH WALK

OI!

AOS

...AND HE MADE A BRIEF KILLING WITH HIS "SURREALIST RACING FORTUNE CARDS"...

'ONEST AUSTIN

11-4

10-1

5-1

6-4

ALL THE WINS

1936 WAS ALSO THE YEAR - HE SAID - WHEN HE FLEW TO BERLIN TO PAINT HITLER'S PORTRAIT! HE BROUGHT THE CANVAS BACK TO ENGLAND TO USE IN SPELLS AGAINST THE NAZIS - HE SAID...

THE DAILY MIRROR RAN WITH THE STORY ---

DAILY MIRROR

HITLER POSES FOR COCKNEY

BUT THEN CAME ANOTHER WAR, AND THE BLITZ! IN MAY 1941, A BOMB HIT THE HOUSE WHERE SPARE WAS LIVING... HE LOST EVERYTHING!

NEXT TIME:
WITCHES!
TIME TRAVEL!!
EXPLODING SEWERS!!!

COMING NEXT MONTH

GETTY IMAGES

APOCALYPSE NOT

EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE WORLD DIDN'T END?

DOGS ON STAGE

THE CURIOUS HISTORY OF CANINE ACTORS

+

JESUS AND NDES, WINGED WEIRDIES, ESSEX WITCHCRAFT AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 300

ON SALE 28 MARCH

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

APRIL 1973

It was a curious thing to publicise, but there it was; on Friday the 13th there was to be a magical duel between two witches (as the paper described them) on Hampstead Heath. Inevitably, the mention of a "cat sacrifice" attracted the attention of the police and the RSPCA ensured that there were a few officials in place to prevent any breach of law and propriety. One newspaper reported that "one witch didn't turn up. The other was seen running away pursued by hundreds of laughing children". We later learned that the one for whom discretion was the better part of valour was David Farrant, described as "President of the British Occult Society", then in the midst of his 'magical' dispute over ownership of the Society. Five months later, (according to the *Daily Express*) Farrant admitted killing cats in his rituals, including one owned by the British blues singer Long John Baldry. **FT1:19**

On the evening of the 2nd, there was a peculiar conjunction in Manchester of a meteorologist out for a walk and a falling block of ice. He saw it fall and shatter on the ground in front of him and, minutes later, the largest chunks were preserved in his freezer at home. A full study of it appeared in the *Meteorological Magazine* for September 1975, observing that it was "clearly composed of cloud water" in concentric layers and unlikely to have fallen off a plane. **FT13:9**

APRIL 1983

The 22nd found our esteemed earth mysteries colleague Paul Devereux staring out of his home-office window in the Cain Valley, Powys, mid-afternoon, at a raging thunderstorm. He reached for his camera, expressly hoping to capture ball lighting – but instead witnessed bead lightning. Among the regular flashes, a particularly violent bolt struck a field a quarter of a mile away. It persisted long enough to appear "so vivid and clear that it almost looked like a rigid structure fixed in the field." It "dissolved" rather than faded, leaving "a series of perhaps a dozen searing white balls of light, each around a foot in diameter, spaced out vertically on the ragged path of the bolt." They "went out", promptly followed by a fall of hail. He told *FT*: "I'm ashamed to admit I couldn't get the camera to eye in time. To be frank I was rooted to the spot". **FT40:19**

Pursuant to last issue's tales of canine sagacity, we offer the story of a young boy who, this month, vanished during a family picnic on the island of Minorca. A 30-hour search led by the mayor proved fruitless. When the mayor got home, his dog would not stop whining or scratching at the door. When let out, the Irish setter led the mayor back to the picnic site and to a crevice, hidden under bushes, into which the three-year-old had fallen, hitting his head. The big question is how the dog knew where to look when it was indoors two miles away at the time of the disappearance. **FT40:12**

APRIL 1993

Daft life goes on outside the pale of the dubious Darwin Awards. As proof, we offer the plight of Alfred E Acree, pursued into a wood in Virginia by police who suspected him of dealing drugs. Although it was dark they had no trouble following him, as he was wearing LA Gear's new 'Light Gear' trainers with lights in the heels that flashed with each step. When caught he had over £500-worth of cocaine on him. **FT69:18**

Another dubious tale for April: according to the *Sun*, two Mormons proselytising in St Albans, Hertfordshire, knocked and asked the woman who came to the door if she "knew about God". When she replied that this was the residence of former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Runcie, the baffled Americans asked: "What church would that be?" **FT70:11**

APRIL 2003

For some time, Phesheya Dube, a reporter for the Swaziland state radio station, filed regular war reports from Baghdad. The host of the news programme on which his reports were featured would often express his concern, over the airwaves, for Phesheya's safety, advising him "to take shelter in a cave to be safe from missiles". Only Phesheya had never been to Afghanistan; he had been broadcasting from a broom cupboard in Mbabane. His gig was up when someone spotted him attending the Swazi parliament. Delightful though this story is, I can't help but notice that it was first printed on the eve of April Fools' Day. **FT173:10**

A 60-year-old Croatian maths professor nearly succumbed to that most fortean of deaths, the book-slide. For three days over the Easter weekend he lay trapped between his bed and a bookcase, beneath 560lb (254kg) of fallen books. He was rescued by police after his wife, who was in hospital, called neighbours to find out why her husband had not visited her. **FT173:11**

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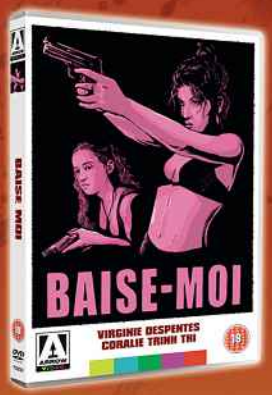

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